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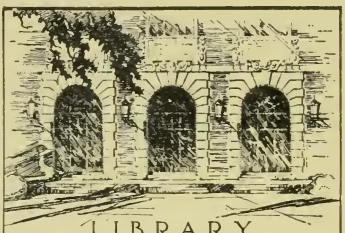

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TILBURY NOGO;

OR,

PASSAGES IN THE LIFE

OF

AN UNSUCCESSFUL MAN.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "DIGBY GRAND."

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

London:
CHAPMAN AND HALL,
193, Piccadilly.

1854.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY ROGERSON AND TUXFORD, 246, STRAND

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TILBURY NOGO.

CHAPTER I.

"Bring forth the horse! The horse was brought.
In truth, he was a noble steed,
Who looked as though the speed of thought
Were in his limbs; but he was wild—
Wild as the wild deer—and untaught;
With spur and bridle undefiled.
Away! away! my breath was gone;
I saw not where he hurried on."

Mazeppa.

"Whoever casts to compass wightie prize,
And thinks to throw out thundering words of threat,
Let poure in lavish cup—and thriftie bittes of meat."

SPENSER'S *Œclogues.*

THERE is a depth of philosophy in the oracular wisdom of the immortal Mr. Weller which can only be equalled by the pithy brevity of his remarks, striking from their truth to the mind

of the superficial observer, as they are calculated to awaken the most profound reflections in the attentive student of human nature. Not the least instructive of his apophthegms are those in which, inspired by the affection of a father as by the prophetic wisdom of a sage, he warns his son "Samivel" against the alluring blandishments of that unsparing enemy of the masculine species which he denominates "the widder." Forgetting, in the magnitude of his object, such petty arithmetical details as to how many ordinary women a widow is equal in "point of attraction," he adjures his darling boy, in tones choked with emotion, to avoid that pitiless class, affirming that, although with maid or wife there may be a chance of escape for the unwary victim, at no time and no season is he safe with a widow!

If such was the case with a sexagenarian Jehu of Mr. Weller's physical and mental constitution, what could possess me to trust myself for a moonlight drive with such a syren as Mrs. Montague Forbes, armed as she was, not only with her own peculiar charms and attractions, managed with the natural coquetry that had grown with her from her cradle, but

likewise doubly and trebly fortified with that dangerous experience which had been acquired in the subjugation of the late Mr. Forbes, and was afterwards brought to perfection by an unsparing career of universal conquest over the male creation? How could I escape? Many an act of folly have I performed in my chequered life: but, with one great exception I probably never did so foolish a thing as volunteering to ride her brother's famous horse "Saraband" for the Hurricane Handicap, during the ensuing Weatherley Races. Nothing but my adoration for my companion, which was now becoming perfectly insurmountable, could have made me forget that neither by nature nor education was I fitted for the task of controlling a violent six-year-old plater through two tempestuous miles of unbridled confusion, amidst a throng of "gentlemen riders," all probably, like myself, very much at the mercy of the infuriated animals they bestrode. Besides, though not likely long to continue so, I was even then a cripple, in consequence of my ill-advised cricketing exhibition; and that alone should have been warning sufficient not again to run myself into uncalled-for peril, a prey to that thirst for dis-

play which had already involved me in so many annoyances. However, I offered to do it; and when I bid farewell to the enslaver, and kissed the fair hand that had volunteered to work me a jockey-cap, gorgeous in her brother's colours, it was too late to retreat. My dreams that night were a confused and chaotic "jumble" of racing-leathers and muslin "aggravations," long ringlets, snaffle bridles, ambition, misgiving, repentance, and apprehension. But "truth came with waking, as light comes with day;" and when I looked out from my bedroom-window on the little Paradise around me, and saw Joe, as usual, busy amongst his roses, need I be ashamed to confess that the feeling uppermost in my mind was, "I wish I was well out of it!"

There was no escape. When I descended to breakfast, the first object that greeted my eyes was a note in an unknown handwriting, sealed with a fox's head, and an ominous "*floreat scientia*," which, on being opened, corroborated with its short and pithy contents my surmises as to its authorship. I give it verbatim, as a despatch concise, peremptory, and to the point:

"Topthorne Lodge, August the —

"DEAR SIR,—Understanding from my sister that you have kindly consented to ride my horse Saraband for the Weatherley Handicap, I now write to apprise you that the weights are out, and he will carry 10st. 7lbs. The race comes off on Wednesday week, so you will have plenty of time for preparation. Saraband is doing good work; but you will excuse my mentioning, even to your experience, that it would be advisable for his rider to be in tolerable wind, as the horse at times shows a little temper! and is an extremely hard puller!!

"I remain, dear sir, very truly yours,

"JOHN TOPTHORNE."

Pleasant, certainly! Then, as soon as my leg was well enough, I should have the satisfaction of living like a hermit and work like a galley-slave, to reduce my "too, too solid flesh" to such attenuated proportions as a bad-tempered weed was capable of carrying; and all because, forsooth, Mrs. Montague Forbes happened to have been born a Miss Topthorne, and Mr. Tilbury Nogo was ambitious of acquiring more than his natural share of fame as a sportsman. Bagshot was delighted. I cannot think why, but he, like the rest of them, seemed to have imbibed the idea that I was a second Osbaldeston in the saddle, and firmly believed that the *experience* for which 'Squire Topthorne gave me credit could not fail to win

a triumph, in which he, as my host and anticipated trainer, would obtain a reflective share. I had been introduced to Mr. Topthorne, the day before, at the cricket-match. He was a great card in this part of the world, being master of that old-established pack of fox-hounds which from time immemorial had hunted the Pippingdon country, conferring upon their supporters a right to wear that uniform which, resplendent with a *green* lining and a *black* collar—startling additions to the brilliancy of a red coat—and further adorned with a stupendous button, displaying on its convex surface a fox rampant, surrounded with the letters "R.A.P.F.H.C.," or "Royal and Ancient Pippingdon Fox Hunting Club," is so generally known and admired in the ball-rooms of the west. Besides this, he was a short, stout, peremptory man, with grey hair and bushy red whiskers, and, altogether, not the sort of person to be trifled with. So, trusting to my lucky stars, and secretly hoping that riding a race might, after all, be a matter of no such very overwhelming difficulty, I wrote the M.F.H. a civil note, begging him to call at the Parsonage on the first convenient opportunity, and prepared, by going into severe

training, to reduce the unnecessary "adipose" matter which was now beginning so comfortably to clothe my frame.

Let me not dwell upon the miseries of that eternal week's training! If Bagshot had been going to ride in his own ponderous person, he could not have taken more pains to lessen the load which Saraband was destined to carry. Directly the sun peeped above the horizon, Joe would knock at my door, and insist on my immediately accompanying him for the diurnal walk. Two pair of flannel "pettiloons," as people call them now, thick winter-trousers, a couple of waistcoats, and every great-coat in the house, are not the articles you would choose for a costume in the dog-days. Then that infernal hill, of which I could just see the top, with its solitary fir-trees, from my window! To those firs it was an honest three miles, if it was a yard; and to those firs and back, it was my miserable fate to trudge every morning before breakfast, and that not at the easy pace which the load of old clothes on my person would have rendered warrantable, but at the utmost stretch of "heel-and-toe" going I could command, alongside of one of the best amateur pedestrians in England, and not even

allowed the unspeakable relief of breaking ever and anon into an occasional "jog." Early rising, with such a waste as this upon the system, would make an anchorite hungry; and when I returned, ravenous for breakfast, what was my repast? A cup of hot tea, and a roll between the blankets, to exude whatever small quantity of vigour might still remain in the system. By the time I felt utterly sapless, I was allowed to dress, and eat two slices of dry toast, after which—my only comfort in this period of purgatory—Joe had not the heart to deny me a cigar. An underdone mutton-chop, and some toast-and-water, at three, made another walk in the afternoon sun absolutely indispensable; and this penance was prolonged to perhaps eleven or twelve miles. Imagine a man in the position of a gentleman toddling along for bare life, enveloped in swaddling-clothes, and steaming from every pore; and conceive his meeting a lady of his acquaintance when in such a predicament! I did; and although I shirked Mrs. Montague Forbes's carriage with the rapidity of an Eton boy when he sees a "master" in the forbidden regions of "up town," I am convinced that not only did that lady recognize the ludicrous pedestrian,

but her coachman and footman likewise participated in the joke, as they enjoyed the spectacle ere I had time to conceal myself behind the nearest thicket. No supper, and a glass of hot gin-and-water—the only liquid I really detest—concluded each of these never-to-be-forgotten days; and Joe, with a praiseworthy anxiety for my success, and distrust of my forbearance, not only saw me to my room at night, but carefully put away and locked up everything eatable and drinkable that the house contained. In addition to this severity of training, my friend further proposed that, in order the more to confirm my powers of resistance, and strengthen my frame and lungs, I should put on "the gloves" with himself in a daily bout at what enthusiasts term the "science of self-defence;" but this, with a lively recollection of my studies in that art under the "Muff of the Minories," I resolutely and peremptorily declined. Well, "time and the hour wear through the roughest day;" and although a week of such preparation may appear to be spun out beyond four times its usual length, yet, submissive in this one respect to the immutable laws of nature, it comes to an end at last. Nor is the self-denying athlete

without his reward. When I looked in the glass, on the eventful morn that ushered in the Weatherley Races, I beheld the reflection of a clearer and healthier, albeit pallid and attenuated, countenance, than I had ever before recognized as my own property while submitting to the diurnal discomfort of shaving; and, though much reduced in size and weight, I felt infinitely more vigorous than I had ever conceived it possible to become on short allowance and toast-and-water. My limbs had never before felt so strong, in proportion to my frame, when the system had been "kept up," as the doctors say, on beefsteaks and port-wine; and whether it was the temperate life I had been leading, or the sporting appearance of my racing gear laid out upon the sofa, or, more probably still, the rainbow-like cap worked by the fair hands of Mrs. Montague, and sent the previous evening, with her kind regards, and such a pink note! I know not, but my nerves felt braced to encounter the unruly propensities of a dozen Sarabands, and, for one short hour, I felt man enough to have ridden—aye, even for the Liverpool Steeple Chase itself!

Irreproachable leathers, cut out by Ham-

mond, and made, as far as the different configuration of our lower limbs would admit, in imitation of those worn by Mr. Mason, of steeple-chase notoriety; boots of a texture that scarce outweighed the silk stockings beneath, and a pliancy that would not have encumbered an opera-dancer; a snowy neckcloth, fastened by a gigantic pin representing "the memorable start for the Derby of '44," and protected by an outer handkerchief of the sportsman's bird's-eye; a silken vesture, of hues to which the flamingo's wing were a colourless daub; the whole enveloped in a loose white great-coat, and surmounted by a shaved hat, with a narrow brim—presented a *tout ensemble* that I rather flatter myself was not to be outdone on Weatherley Race-course; and when Joe drove me on to that Olympic plain, he himself confessed that, if Saraband only looked as "like winning" as his jockey, the odds in his favour were, to use his own clerical metaphor, "a deanery to a deaconship."

"A lovely day for our triumph, Mr. Nogo," said the winning voice of Mrs. Montague Forbes, as we brought the dog-cart to an anchor alongside of her well-appointed barouche; and ere I could reply in suitable

terms to the fair instigator of my present undertaking, and express my thanks for the cap she had worked for me, I was interrupted by the rough tones of her brother Topthorne, as he rode a short, square cob, the very image of himself, hastily up to the carriage—

"All right as to weight, Nogo? Look very pale!" (Confound him!) Here, jump on this mare! I want to show you the course. There's an awkward turn at the gravel-pit corner, and that is the way Saraband always goes home after galloping; so I think you had better be prepared for it."

And before I knew very well where I was, I found myself seated on a great, lumbering, lop-eared bay mare, evidently belonging to the Pippingdon establishment, as what is termed "one of the men's horses," with an enormous head, and her tail tucked close into her quarters, as if she was only waiting for a dirty place to kick till she got rid of her burthen—a consummation which her absence of "mouth" made me sensible she was quite capable of effecting whenever she should think proper; and ere I had time to reflect upon the inconveniences of such a downfall at such a time, I was galloping for bare life after the sturdy

little cob and its energetic rider, to inspect the dangerous corner which led so temptingly to Saraband's wished-for home.

"Look here, Mr. Nogo," said the laconic Topthorne, as he pulled the cob up with a jerk, and wiped his brows with a yellow pocket-handkerchief: "Mind that post! that's where he'll try to bolt. There's the horse—looks well in his clothing, don't he? It's a pity you couldn't have ridden him one or two gallops; only, with *your practice*, it wasn't necessary. Now listen to me. I'm a man of few words: *if you can hold him*, you wait upon the others till you get past this turn; don't let him run you against that post: then get up to your horses, take a pull at him, and *come* like blazes! If he don't win, it's your fault."

All this was Greek to me; but it was getting so disagreeable that I began to feel desperate. What with *this* turn and *that* post, and the chance, if not certainty, of the brute bolting, and then *coming* like blazes, which I presumed meant *going* like lightning; and, after all, that it should be *my fault* if I did not succeed in steering this accursed animal safely home, in advance of his competitors! Had I not felt that SHE was a Miss Topthorne, I

should have been quite angry: as it was, I answered, sulkily enough, "that it was an awkward, ugly sort of course (the view, I may remark, commanded half-a-dozen counties, and was one of the finest in England); but I dared say was good enough for *platers;* and if Saraband was 'worth a row of gingerbread,' he ought to win in the company he was likely to meet." This uncourteous reply, I found, elevated me at once twenty per cent. in the estimation of my companion; and as we rode back to the carriages, to gain a position for the first race, he listened to my remarks with deferential attention. For one brief and delightful half-hour I forgot my miseries, I disregarded my apprehensions, I shut my eyes to my fate; for was I not sitting by sweet Mrs. Montague Forbes, in the delicious sunshine; exchanging those *nothings* which may mean so much, especially with a widow, and reciprocating what Moore calls "the twopenny-post of the eyes;" whilst my companion gazed upward into my face with that expression of hero-worship which we may imagine Thais to have directed towards Alexander? What was it to us that the Two-year-old Stake brought *one* to the post, and ended in a miserable "walk-

over" ?—that the Farmers' Plate, "for horses *bonâ fide* the property of yeomen holding land within the district hunted by the Pippingdon hounds, and ridden by their owners," after three false starts and two sworn cases of "crossing," terminated in a wrangle; the decision of which by Mr. Topthorne, as the only steward present, gave such universal dissatisfaction as eventually to lead to the total dismemberment of the Pippingdon Hunt? Small care had we of such trifles as these, for were we not all-in-all to each other? And did not the widow's hand tremble in mine, as she lent a gentle pressure, and bid me "Come back to luncheon after winning my race"? Come back, indeed! how could I tell I might not be carried back? There was a white gate, that looked the very thing, when taken off its hinges, to sustain the mutilated form of a hapless equestrian; and had I not read and heard of such catastrophes, till my very blood ran cold? However, it is too late now! Topthorne summons me from the carriage, and, as he casts his eye towards the heavens, suggests the propriety of getting "the Hurricane Handicap" over before the thunder-storm, which is obviously brewing, and which my pre-occupation

has prevented my perceiving; and I am torn from the comfortable barouche and its gentle owner, to consign my person to the miseries of a five-pound saddle and the tender mercies of the impatient Saraband.

"What horse is that, kicking so violently in his clothing, and enlarging with every lash the circle of his admirers?"

"That be 'Squire Topthorne's" is the consolatory reply of the rustic to whom I had addressed the unconscious interrogatory.

"This way, Nogo," says the hurrying owner, as the first heavy drops of rain plash upon my ungloved hands; "come and get weighed before the storm."

And, utterly incapable of resistance, I follow my conductor into the narrow weighing-house, where a fellow-sufferer is even now "going to scale," with straightened legs and up-turned toes, as he swings betwixt earth and heaven, his whip between his teeth, and nursing on his lap a confused mass of girths, saddle-flaps, snaffles, martingale, and stirrup-irons. Good heavens! it is Segundo! And I feel for a moment as if my chances of success were increased tenfold by the presence of my knowing friend. Alas! I forget that with such an an-

tagonist I cannot hope to win. Short and hurried are our mutual greetings and inquiries; for the Clerk of the Course, a sporting hairdresser from Weatherley, is waxing impatient of the many delays occasioned by gentlemen's utter ignorance of their probable weight. I have only time to ascertain that Segundo has just arrived from London, for the purpose of riding Colonel Crowther's "Stopgap;" and when he casually mentions that he has backed the old screw for "a pony," I feel that *my* chance is indeed out. How I envy my former instructor's coolness, as, after weighing like a man whose whole life had been spent in doing nothing else, he swaggered off to superintend in person the saddling of the docile "Stopgap"! He never saw the horse before; yet, when he bounded lightly on his back, the animal bent his neck and played cheerfully with his bit, as though he recognized a master's hand, and cantered up the course with a long easy swing that argued volumes in favour of Segundo's judgment.

In the meantime I find myself divested of the white great-coat, and furnished in lieu thereof with a saddle and stirrup-irons, of much the same pattern as those which caparisoned

the rocking-horse of my juvenile days. I swing dizzily in the scale, and, thanks to Joe's judicious training, I am right to a pound.

"Make haste, if you please, sir," says the Clerk of the Course, with a pen in his mouth, and a red book, like a tax-gatherer's, in his hand; "for there are three more gentlemen-riders to weigh."

And as I leave the weighing-house, in the custody of Squire Topthorne, I catch a glimpse of my fellow-sufferers. A stout yeoman, who has entered his own half-bred bay; a nondescript elderly man, that looks like a veterinary surgeon out of practice, and presents the anomaly of long grey air streaming from under a black-velvet jockey-cap, and whose qualification to ride as a gentleman consists in his subscribing five pounds a year to the Pippingdon Hunt; and a tall, lanky youth, who, if not now in a funk, must be at all times an individual of unnaturally pallid complexion, complete the field about to contend for the Great Hurricane Handicap.

I walk up the course like a man in a dream —a peal of thunder is growling round the horizon, but I hear it not—the rain has set in, as only summer rain can; and a silk jacket,

however gorgeous in colour, is but a poor protection for a wasted frame; yet I heed it not. Topthorne is descanting volubly upon the strategy by which I am to win the race; but his pithy sentences fall unheeded on my ear. One object alone rivets all my attention—one group of struggling figures have a morbid fascination for mine eye:—a chestnut horse is plunging wildly forward, with a cloth about his head; whilst a trainer, a groom, and a boy, are vainly endeavouring to saddle the refractory brute. That horse is Saraband; and on that saddle am I destined to embark! Topthorne's conversation seems to flow on, in an unconnected string of sentences, about "coming," and "going," and "waiting," and "staying," and "hugging the posts," and "living the distance," and, above all, not "disappointing the horse." How I wish I could disappoint him!—but it is too late now. The confused hum of voices plays soothingly on my ear, as I approach the spot where the chestnut horse is fidgetting; and, with that appreciation of trifles peculiar to moments of intense excitement, I remark a small piece of orange-peel on the turf, and wonder how much bigger it would require to be to throw a horse down. An iron

gripe seizes me by the ankle—Topthorne's face is turned upward, towards mine—an elastic pair of shoulders lengthen themselves out in front of me—I am conscious that my reins are knotted extremely short, and that my mainstay, the trainer, has abandoned me to my own devices, and I feel that I am face to face with my fate. Great is my surprise to discover that the dreaded Saraband requires an immense deal of kicking along to induce him to extend himself in his preparatory canter, and that the infuriated horse who must be saddled blindfold and ridden by an equestrian Hercules may turn out the veriest slug after all.

What is it but a beautiful arrangement of nature, proving the reciprocal fitness which exists between the biped and the brute, that causes a man, however nervous he may have previously been, to feel, when once settled in the saddle, a degree of courage rising within him proportionate to the occasion? Though Saraband gave me a taste of his eccentricities as he wheeled round to come up the course, and pulled and tore disagreeably enough directly his head was turned in the direction of his own stable, I felt so much more at home on him than I expected, that the reaction from

a state of positive alarm to one of comparative confidence enabled me to take notice of all that was going on, and to scan, though with an inexperienced eye, the different competitors for the race.

Segundo, who was good enough to compliment me on my sporting appearance as we rode together to the starting-post, was the only one that appeared dangerous ; the farmer's horse was evidently fat, and looked, what he was, a good average hunter ; the Vet's narrow, fiddle-headed weed was obviously over-trained; and the pale youth, though mounted on a racing-looking animal in excellent condition, was notoriously a muff of the first water. I had a sort of impression on my mind that Topthorne had told me my horse was more speedy than lasting, and I determined to take advantage of Segundo's knowledge and experience to wait upon him throughout the race and win at the finish, if I could—a wise resolution, and one to which the only objection was the difficulty of carrying it out. What a business it was to start us ! The hairdresser had a good idea of how it ought to be done, and strutted about with his red flag in his hand in a most imposing manner ; but the team he had to deal

with were obstreperous to a degree, and it would have required a far more practised hand than the man of curling-irons to ensure to each his fair chance. First, the Vet would get too far forward, and had to be cautioned, not to say rebuked; then the farmer's horse dodged right across the pale young gentleman, who stared about him in utter helplessness.

In the meantime Saraband backs out of the turmoil, and, standing bolt upright on his hind legs, is with difficulty persuaded to re-enter the undisciplined ranks. When this is accomplished, a fresh disturbance breaks out with the *bay*. And, just at the moment when we are most hopelessly at sixes and sevens, the hairdresser loses all patience—the flag drops—Saraband bounds forward into the air—my cap flies from my head—every man for himself—the devil take the hindmost—and we are off!

CHAPTER II.

" I prithee go and get me some repast,
I care not what, so it be wholesome food—
Why then the beef, and let the mustard rest."

Taming of the Shrew.

" Why need my tongue the issue tell?
We ran our course—my charger fell."

Marmion.

" I DON'T care—I can't help thinking you made too much use of the old horse. I begged of you upon no account to *come* till the finish; and hang me! if you didn't make strong running the whole way round!"

Such was the expostulation addressed to me by the disappointed owner of the beaten " Saraband," as we sat in juxta-position at the ordinary-table, and waited sulkily for our dinner on the afternoon of the race. As in

its kitchen arrangements, the "Green Dragon" at Weatherley was like the "Green Dragon" everywhere else—profuse in its promises, and lavish in its bill of fare, but provokingly dilatory in the production of those dishes it set forth so vauntingly—Icannot better employ the interval which elapsed between our sitting down to a long table, covered for an ordinary of some twenty or thirty guests, the majority of whom were even now impatiently beginning upon dry bread, and the welcome appearance of the first tureen of mock-turtle, borne by a perspiring waiter in Berlin gloves, than by describing the proceedings of that eventful day, which led to the ungracious remark from Squire Topthorne recorded above.

The instant the flag was dropped I have already said Saraband started away with a bound, like that of a stricken deer; and for a few awful moments I felt utterly powerless to control or even guide the tearing brute. With the small muscular strength I naturally possessed reduced by inanition; with knotted reins, shortened stirrups, and a saddle the size of a dessert-plate, all my preconceived notions as to horsemanship, all the practice I had acquired in the hunting-field, were utterly un-

available. Pulled over his withers by his awkward "boring" ways; only saved from being unhorsed by the comparative smoothness of a thorough-bred one's stride; dizzy from the terrific rapidity of the pace, I was confused and helpless as a child. Luckily for me, however, the course for the first half-mile was perfectly straight, nearly as deep as Knavesmire at all seasons of the year, and considerably on the rise—this it was that preserved me from destruction. Saraband, at no time a stout horse, was perfectly amenable to reason before he reached the first turn, and the ill-judged pace at which I had been going had left the others far in the rear. Though weakened by my training, I had the advantage of being in good wind; and as my horse dropped to my hand, and became every stride less uncontrollable, the delightful thought flashed across my mind that I might win after all! I tried to nurse him; I tried to steady him; but in vain: if I wished to decrease the pace, he wasted his powers in the air: if I got fast hold of his head, down it went between his knees, pulling me over his shoulders, and grating my unprotected knuckles most painfully against the buckles of his breast-plate. There was nothing

for it but to run the race through from end to end; and even whilst I thus determined, the awkward gravel-pit corner came in view; and here it was that Joe Bagshot proved himself a trusty friend. As we neared the dreaded turn, I felt by the uncomfortable manner in which Saraband was going that he meditated some awful act of insubordination; and when within half-a-dozen strides of the well-known post, he got his head in the air till I saw the white streak down his nose, and swerving violently across the course, bore me "*nolens volens*" in the direction of the dangerous gravel-pits. I had just given myself up, when Joe's stalwart form, waving a voluminous red pocket-handkerchief in the brute's face, sent him back with a bound into the proper direction. The posts were a long way apart; and although I shaved the next one with my knee as we resumed our career, it was on the right side, and I was never actually off the course. It was "touch-and-go," and nothing but a firm reliance on my stirrup-leathers, and the strong hold I had of his head, saved me from a rattling fall. But in the mean time the other horses were over-hauling us, our swerve had lost us several strides, and as I reached the distance-post,

Colonel Crowther's Stop-gap showed his ugly head at my girths. Soon he was alongside of me; Segundo sitting motionless, as if in an arm-chair. My blood was up, and I flogged with energy, and would fain have spurred as well. I thought I did; but an after-examination of Saraband's sides convinced me that, with the exception of one ill-directed thrust, which reached his shoulder! my kicking and sprawling were wasted upon empty air. Well, I ran a good second, everybody said. I *finished* beautifully: and a good-natured remark of Segundo's, to whom they all looked up as an authority, "that no man in England could have ridden that awkward brute better!" stamped me at once as a jockey of the highest order. It was a triumph, though a defeat. Joe Bagshot congratulated me on having *so nearly won*. Mrs. Montague Forbes showered her sweetest smiles, as I did justice to her lobster-salad. I presented Saraband's groom with a sovereign, and everybody was satisfied except the owner, who, having made up his mind that his horse must win, could only find consolation in such muttered compliments as the following, which I unwittingly overheard—

"All nonsense! run the horse's head off—

these dandies all alike—think they know better than anyone else—he's a puppy, and my sister's a fool!"

Man is a gregarious animal, and as such it is natural for him to feed in the society of his fellow-creatures: but although I am far from denying in theory the propriety of such sociable arrangement, I cannot but confess that in practice an over-crowded ordinary is to me the most disagreeable method of discussing my daily sustenance. Nor was that at which Squire Topthorne presided, as principal steward of the Weatherley Races, any exception to the generality of these gatherings. After waiting forty minutes for dinner, it is hard to have your soup as cold as if the repast had been that length of time waiting for *you;* and as mock-turtle loses much of its natural merit by being chilled, so is inferior sherry—"such as the Spanish nobles drink"—not improved by being poured out lukewarm into a cloudy glass. A waiter, though he enjoys the nearest approach to ubiquity of any known animal, save the Irishman's bird, cannot multiply himself sufficiently to attend to the wants of some twenty guests; nor does the ostler's assistant, albeit clad for the nonce in a tail-coat and

coloured neckcloth, effectually remedy this deficiency of attendance. True, the female servants of the establishment render all the aid in their power on the further side of the door; whilst now and then she whose colour is freshest, and ribbons of the gayest hue, may be tempted over the threshold by one of the fortunate occupiers of the lower end of the table: but such an apparition is only additionally aggravating to us dignitaries at the top, whose turbot must be eaten without the lobster-sauce, which, however, reaches the scene of action in time to supply the place of that missing mustard for which we call in vain with our boiled beef. Then do what you will, you cannot help eating in a hurry, consequent upon the crowd, noise, and confusion around you; which reminds you irresistibly, if you are old enough to remember them, of the coaching dinners in days gone by. The consequence is that your digestion, if not your appetite, is perfectly satisfied by the time the square little pieces of strong cheese make their appearance: and when the cloth is drawn, and the president's hammer proclaims that the season for toasts has arrived, for once contrary to the laws of Nature, and the whole practice of your

lifetime, you feel thankful that "dinner is over at last!"

Strong thumps from Mr. Topthorne's hammer, and his stentorian voice shouting to the vice-president, "Mr. Scrubley—'The Queen'!" produce an immediate demand on the part of the guests for those "vanities" with which it is their practice to moisten their after-dinner clay. Strong red port appears to be the beverage most affected by the members of the Pippingdon Hunt; whilst their previous experience of its excellence during dinner makes the orders for sherry less numerous than usual amongst the company. The pallid young gentleman of the morning, now enjoying a far healthier bloom (who, I may remark, contrived to get distanced in the race), orders claret; whilst the jolly yeoman, game to the last, and incited thereto by his veterinarian competitor, shouts lustily for a bottle of champagne, and pays for it on the spot in a multiplicity of half-crowns. Brandy-and-water is not without its votaries at the lower end of the table; whilst Mr. Scrubley, hair-dresser of the town of Weatherley, Clerk of the Course, Vice-President of the Racing Club, and Secretary to the Pippingdon Hunt, carries a highly popular motion

in favour of a huge bowl of punch. The members of the fox-hunting establishment, whom I observed to apply themselves most religiously to the port, were one and all conspicuous for their ruddy countenances and portly persons; so concluding their beverage could not possibly be unwholesome, I hastened to follow their jovial example, thereby winning an approving nod from the president, who seemed to be much of old Doctor Johnson's opinion, as regarded fluids—"Claret is all very well for boys; port for men; but he who aspires to be a hero, sir (smiling), should drink brandy!" The usual toasts having been got through, and the company in a pleasing vein of jovial liberality, a certain red book, bearing the appearance of a ledger, made its appearance, and was handed from one to the other with ominous rapidity. No one seemed much inclined to master its contents, till an adventurous individual, warmed with wine, and recollecting that a twelvemonth would elapse ere he should be called upon to pay, handsomely headed the list as a subscriber to the handicap for the ensuing year, and thus purchased a nomination not likely to be particularly useful to a man who, as he himself told

us, "never had kept race-horses, and never would." Example is contagious: and ere long the column was half filled, Mr. Nogo's name, I am sorry to say, imprudently appearing amongst the other sporting subscribers. Segundo likewise, much to my surprise, favoured them with his signature; but afterwards explained to me that his autograph was all he thought necessary to bestow; and that having some few acres in that part of the country, he considered it due to his station to give them at least *a claim* upon one of their landed proprietors! As the decanters waned, caution and shyness rapidly gave place to magnificence and bravado. Phantom steeple-chases, of incalculable "entries," over impracticable lines, were sketched with a spirit and enthusiasm that made it a thousand pities they should never arrive at maturity, and disclose to an astonished country the unheard-of clippers, of which each man seemed to have at least one in his stable. Matches over Weatherley race-course, for half-bred horses, to run distances varying from two to four miles, with the rigorous stipulation that they should be "half-forfeit" and "owners up," were discussed in unlimited profusion, though I did not remark

that many of these challenges were entered in those fatal pages from which there was no withdrawal, that reposed under the especial care of Mr. Scrubley. (Why is it—I may here ask in parenthesis—why is it that when gentlemen, unconnected with the turf, are prompted by their worse angels to make matches, involving the contest of horses of unknown pedigree, they will always select the longest distance and the severest course for the massacre of their favourites? It is, I believe, generally conceded at Newmarket, that one mile, if the pace be good enough, is distance sufficient to try the merits of an Eclipse, with all the advantages of such preparation as Newmarket trainers can bestow; but I am at a loss to conceive upon what principle the squire's hack, trained by the squire's coachman, should be unable to contend with the doctor's Welsh galloway, unless that distance be increased four-fold.) Nor was the Babel-like confusion, incidental to a large and convivial party—all talking and betting at once—the only entertainment furnished for our evening's amusement. Orpheus vindicated his power over these modern Centaurs; and amidst wreaths of smoke from the unfailing cigars,

the very rafters shook to jocund glee and stentorian chorus. The champagne-drinking yeoman, in a fine mellow voice, indulged us with "The Brown Bowl;" Topthorne gave us "Tally-ho the Hounds, Sir!" and Scrubley —the accomplished Scrubley—led the time-honoured catch, that preserves the deathless fame of "Molly, the charming maid, that carried the milking-pail!" Dickens's cobbler gives the most unanswerable reason for dining early—"I finds I gets on better at supper when I does!" and, like him, we discovered ere long that a hurried dinner at six, succeeded by a protracted sitting and "a wet evening," was an admirable preparation for a hot supper. "Broiled bones, devilled gizzard, anchovy-toasts, and red herrings fried in gin (the latter an inspiration of Segundo's, and by him denominated "Hussar-Broth!") are wonderful auxiliaries to that thirst which the same authority declares to be the normal condition of man; and by the time it is quenched with bottled porter, pale ale, and "brandy and soda," all sublunary matters assume a rosy hue of contented joviality, and "We won't go home till morning!" springs unbidden to the sleepless Bacchanalian's lips. But there appears to

be a great disturbance going on at the bottom of the table; and through the din of voices the reiterated assurances of the jolly yeoman rise triumphant over the storm. "Do it!" he exclaims, his broad face purple with excitement, his sturdy figure waving to and fro as he grasps his neighbour's chair, and his eyes glaring through the cigar-smoke like the lamps of the down-train in a fog.

"I'll bet two to one he does it, without a balk or a refusal! Two to one! who'll take it—pounds, ponies, or hundreds?"

"What is it?" "I'll take it!" "I'll lay it!" resound through the room; and ere I can gather from my neighbour Topthorne, who waxes more laconic as he gets drunk, "that the fool wants to jump his horse over the dining-room table," a space has been cleared away by the applauding crowd, and a slipping, staggering step, like the approach of a ghost in a farce, is heard ascending the wooden stairs. Sure enough the jolly yeoman has backed his famous bay hunter "Shamrock," that day so unsuccessful for the "Hurricane Handicap," to walk up-stairs (fortunately the steps are broad and few) to carry twelve-stone over the "social board" as it stands, with its glittering

array of lights, glasses, jugs, and punch-bowls; to walk down again into his own stable, without giving his rider a fall; and eat a quartern of oats and a double-handful of beans as if nothing had happened. The latter part of the wager is not much speculated on; but the principal feat of clearing the mahogany creates a vast amount of conversation; and ere I have recovered my astonishment at such an unheard-of proposition, sufficiently to form an opinion of its feasibility, a clothed head makes its appearance at the door, and amidst shouts of wonder and applause in walks "Shamrock," hooded and "done-up" for his rest, looking no whit more surprised than those wonderfully-educated animals which nightly astonish the play-goers "over the water" at Astley's Amphitheatre. Although not "broke to the drawing-room," he betrays but little alarm at being stripped; and as he cocks his ears, and turns his sagacious head round to his excited master, who is busy saddling him, I cannot help thinking how very much the soberest and most sensible of the party is the unreasoning animal. By the time he is fully caparisoned, however, a difficulty arises as to the terms of the wager. Shamrock is to carry twelve stone,

and his owner besides being incomparably too drunk to ride, must weigh at least thirteen, after all the eatables and drinkables he has been stowing away so diligently—not that he cares a farthing! but the sharp old veterinarian, who has been eagerly watching the horse, seems to scent "a good thing," and will not hear of his throwing away a chance. This old man, although he has been eating, drinking, and smoking incessantly since six o'clock, is now as sober as when he sat down; and walking quietly up to Segundo, he whispers a few words in his ear, which produce an electrical effect on my friend, ever wide-awake when there is what he calls "anything to be done." The fact is, the horse has performed the same feat before in his presence; he has ascertained that the animal is not much frightened, and his shrewd eyes twinkle with anticipated triumph as he whispers to Segundo—

"You sit quiet on him, Sir, and give him his head! *he* knows how to do it: and (*sotto voce*) you back him for a trifle with Mr. Nogo, or the Squire!"

Segundo, who values his neck as little as any other of his remaining possessions, bounds on him in a moment, having previously laid

out a few "fives," to make it worth his while: the crowd draw back to give him a fair "offer," as they say in Ireland, at his fence, and every thing is prepared for the feat, when, "fierce as ten Furies, terrible as Hell," the landlady of the Green Dragon—herself a host and hostess, all in one—bounces into the room, and stalking up to the astonished Topthorne, now more than half asleep, confronts him then and there on his presidential throne, and pours upon his devoted head the pent-up torrent of her wrath—

"Gentlemen, indeed! and call yourselves gentlemen, who are ignorant to behave as such! which has never before taken place in the Green Dragon and Commercial Posting-House—for a brute *h*animal to be taken like a Christian out of his warm bed—and you, Mr. Topthorne, the father of a family, as ought to be a respectable man, and a magistrate likewise—to sit there and stare at a lone woman like a block of wood, and never to say good or bad, which is unbecoming your station and all your stations; for to decent mirth I never have, and never will object, which is what we all lives by; but to be bringing your racchorses and your quadrupeds up two pair of stairs,

into a respectable woman's principal dining-room, thirty feet long, with a bay-window and mahogany dining-tables, and the filth and the mess of it, is what I will not abide if there's justice to be had for rich or poor!"

And here an opportune flood of tears, and an attack of what medical gentlemen term "hysteria"—a formidable malady when seizing a stout elderly lady, of some sixteen stone, and enhanced in its awful symptoms by a festive costume, such as that borne by the interesting sufferer—put a stop to the volubility of her abuse: and entrusting her to the care of the veterinary surgeon, as the most eligible substitute for a regular practitioner, we proceeded with the business in hand, which the unfortunate landlady, notwithstanding all her protestations, was compelled to witness. The steed was mounted, the room cleared, and the word given. Segundo sat as still as a statue upon the docile animal; and Shamrock, trotting up to the unusual fence, cleared it like a deer, then stood quietly in the middle of the room, snorting as though to express his surprise at the vagaries of us bipeds, and pawing the unyielding floor, as much as to inquire if we had

any more orders ere he might go quietly back to bed.

The landlady had in the meantime been somewhat mollified by the attentions of so many gentlemen, all eager to deprecate her indignation; and as, like most of her sex, who, to use her own words, "cotton to be led, but can't abear to be driven," she was a regular trump if you only knew how to manage her the right way, she quickly forgot her previous ire, in her unqualified admiration of the dangerous feat; and walking up to Shamrock's head, patted his smooth satin neck, amidst rounds of uproarious applause. We drank her health then and there; and the whole thing must have gone off in the most triumphant manner, had not this last bumper, in addition to the many which I had already quaffed, prompted me to undertake in my own person the most dangerous part of the performance, which was to ride the horse down-stairs again on his way to his own apartments, and which portion of the equestrian feat, as it was not comprehended in the bets pending thereon, Segundo had positively declined to perform. Here, I thought, was an opportunity of out-Heroding Herod, and distancing even him who

had instructed me in all such deeds of daring. Accordingly, much to the amusement of the drunken throng, and the re-awakened horror of the landlady, I mounted the impatient Shamrock on his homeward journey, and accompanied by the good wishes of Topthorne, who was unable to leave his chair, and guided by the two most drunken gentlemen of the party, bearing each a silver candelabrum, with its load of wax-lights swaying to and fro in their unsteady hands, I reached the top of the staircase without injury, and commenced my perilous descent. A cat on the ice, who has been shod by the mischief of the rising generation with a complete set of inverted walnut-shells, is about as vivid an emblem of alarm and insecurity as can well be exhibited; but I doubt if the action of Grimalkin herself, under these uncomfortable circumstances, is more uncertain than was that of the cautious Shamrock in his precarious journey.

The first landing-place we reached triumphantly; and we were now directly opposite the bar-window, which opened on the stairs, and through which, the sash being up, a very pretty attendant, with corkscrew ringlets, was watching the performances. Ambitious of dis-

tinguishing myself in the eyes of this Hebe, and demonstrating the thorough understanding which, under all circumstances, exists between the good horseman and his steed, I ventured most incautiously to hurry the careful pace at which Shamrock was so sagaciously toiling down-stairs. A hind foot slipped ; a loud snort announced that the horse was thoroughly terrified ; he lost his footing and his presence of mind at one and the same time ; with a wild plunge forward he knocked down the leading torch-bearer, and we were enveloped in comparative darkness. I heard a scream of terror, and the crashing of wood-work—probably the banisters, as I found myself describing a "parabola" over my horse's head into the obscure ; and although my fall was broke by its fair denizen and the whole interior furniture and economy of that snuggery which is denominated the bar, I was carried to bed sufficiently confused to be utterly unconscious of the devastation which accompanied my downfall.

The bill which I had next morning to pay gives me a vivid idea of the general smash created by my unexpected visit into this portion of the premises watched over by the Green Dragon. A gentleman flying head-foremost

through an open window into the arms of a pretty barmaid, and *with* her bringing to the ground a half-dozen of sherry, a case of liqueur-bottles, a set of tea-things, a large fire-screen, a cold apple-tart, and several jars of hot pickles, is lucky if he escape as I did, with a contused shoulder, a pair of black eyes (not quite such pretty ones as the barmaid's), and a swinging long bill to liquidate for this unceremonious method of being "called to the bar."

CHAPTER III.

"Give me mine angle. We'll to the river. There,
My musick playing far off, I will betray
Tawny-finned fishes: my bended hook shall pierce
Their slimy jaws: and as I draw them up,
I'll think them every one an Antony,
And say, Ah, ah! you're caught."

Antony and Cleopatra.

Let it not be supposed by the reader, to whom I have so openly confessed my many follies and vagaries, that my whole life, as a quiet invalid, on a visit to a country clergyman for the restoration of his health, was nothing but a series of such morning adventures and midnight freaks as those I have recorded in connection with my *début* as a "gentleman rider." Other and more contemplative pursuits served to fill up my leisure hours; and whilst Bagshot was engaged with

his clerical duties, which no temptation could ever induce him to neglect, I had abundant opportunities for the restoration of my health and improvement of my intellect in his grounds and library. A book in the open air, whether it be a "Dissertation on the Specific Gravity of Fluids, or the last number of *Punch*, is infinitely more agreeable than the same volume perused in an arm-chair; and many a delicious hour did I enjoy, reclining at my ease in Joe's delightful garden, basking in the sunshine, or dozing in the shade, inhaling the fragrance of his roses, fanned by the breeze that stole over his new-mown hay (a *second* crop, of which the owner was justly proud), and lulled by the hum of what Dr. Watts piously denominates the "busy bee," but with whom I never can help sympathizing as a thorough idler like myself. All this, with the page of instruction spread open on my knee—too often disregarded, in my intense enjoyment of the surrounding atmosphere—made a paradise of indolence, to which the addition of a "real foreign cigar" left nothing to be desired—not even the "black eyes" which, according to Tommy Moore, in conjunction with "lemonade," constitute the Persian's idea of a future

heaven. Nor were these orbs, albeit of languishing blue instead of sparkling black, very far distant from the bower I so constantly frequented. From the Parsonage to Topthorne Lodge was but three miles as the crow flies; and at Topthorne Lodge, need I say, Mrs. Montague Forbes was staying with her bachelor brother, on a prolonged visit? Between the two houses, and within easy reach of either, lay a broad and picturesque sheet of water, called Cowslip Mere, beneath the sedgy banks of which the gigantic pike loved to doze away the dreamy hours of noon, whilst the lake's unruffled surface bore punt and pleasure-boat noiselessly above his haunts. Here did I acquire my only knowledge of the Waltonian science; and here, under the tuition of mine accomplished host, did I progress rapidly in the contemplative art of trolling. But was the shark in miniature—the scaly monster of the hideous jaw—the only attraction that lured me to these golden waters? Was it a pure admiration for Nature, or an unalloyed love of sport, that led me to inclose my person in duck continuations, turned-down collars, a straw hat, and a tailless jacket—a costume which it is advisable for gentlemen to

abandon when turned of thirty—or had I truly "other fish to fry?" Was there another bait, to which I was the unsuspecting gudgeon? Even so. Antony—"broad-fronted Antony"—despised not to dress the hooks of his "serpent of old Nile;" the "first gentleman in England" had his Virginia Water, nor are we to suppose that he was destitute of some fair minister to carry his landing-net; the "monks of old" were anglers to a man, as the site of every ruined abbey and monastery vouches for, with its neighbour, the trout-stream—and, although inveterate bachelors, they were anything but callous to the charms of the other sex, "if ancient tales say true, nor wrong these holy men;" and with such worthy examples before our eyes, it is not too much to say that "fishing and flirting" may be coupled together with as much justice as any other two unconnected pursuits. Behold me, then, embarked on the crystal surface of Cowslip Mere! the waters glistening in the sun like burnished gold, the summer-breeze sighing in the distant woods that fringe the lake, the wood-pigeon ever and anon pouring his plaintive note from their cool, shady depths, the lazy plash of oars falling drowsily on the contented ear, and the low, sweet,

pleading voice of Mrs. Montague Forbes completing the spell that pervades the whole enchanting scene. Our craft is a roomy, broad-bottomed punt, warranted not to upset with any amount of romping, and, if pace be no object, sufficiently handy to be guided (I can hardly say propelled) by two short, sturdy oars,

"Youth at the prow, and Pleasure at the helm."

Our crew consists of the syren aforesaid, her brother the 'Squire (who, not without grumbling, takes his share of the locomotive labour), Joe Bagshot, and myself. Four rods, supplied with all the mechanism of multiplying reels, patent lines, and ill-fated natural bait, are sticking out in every direction, for the entrapping of some unwary fish; whilst the spare paraphernalia which encumbers the bottom of the boat would lead you to suppose that a war of extermination had been declared against the cold-blooded denizens of the deep. Need I add that, in such society, a well-filled hamper, containing cold pie, hard-boiled eggs, and bottled porter, was not forgotten? The 'Squire is toiling at the oars, and his broad face (never of the palest) is now in hue like

the setting sun. Mrs. Montague Forbes, reclining in a graceful attitude upon the "well" which contains the living, but doomed, gudgeons preserved for "bait," is shading her handsome face with a gorgeous parasol, and doing the agreeable most diligently to my unworthy self, who am lying with my face to heaven, and my straw hat protecting my eyes, in a state of indolent satisfaction, having left my rod and line to trail over the stern, and take its chance of any erratic fish that may accidentally fancy the treacherous morsel it offers. But of no such idleness is Joe guilty. Ever keen in all matters of sport, from rat-catching upwards, he is now standing like a Colossus in the bows of our boat (if bows those can be called, which need only proceed in a contrary direction to become the stern); and dexterously does he fling out the glittering bait, with as much energy and precision as that of the fly-fisher, who directs to an inch the gaudy imitation, which I have always marvelled should be taken for a real insect by the hungriest of trout.

"Under the bank, Joe," grunts the labouring 'Squire. "Just where those weeds are parted, I had hold of a monster yes-

terday; but I did not give him time to gorge."

Whirr goes the line, strong enough to hold a crocodile, and in flops the bait at the exact spot designated. Ere the circling eddy has widened into repose, the reel is rapidly spinning off its coils; and, though he scorns to complain, I am sure it is burning Joe's nervous fingers as it slides through his grasp. Out comes Topthorne's watch, for he is punctilious to a degree in all matters of this kind; and he imposes on us an ominous silence during the prescribed five minutes allowed for the doomed fish thoroughly to digest his unexpected repast, nor will all the impatience of his companions, to whom this pause of expectation appears an age, induce him to abate one second of the accustomed "law." At length, replacing his watch in his fob with as much importance as if his hounds had just settled to their fox, and he had been preparing to minute their performance, he laconically observes, "Time, Joe! wind him up!" Forward I rush with the landing-net, dripping a liberal shower-bath, in my hurry, on the very *piquante* summer-toilette of Mrs. Montague Forbes—a piece of awkwardness which, with the pro-

verbial sweet temper of a lady when *angling*, passes unnoticed and unreproved. Joe works his reel like the handle of a barrel-organ; the rod bends to a semicircle; an unexpected resistance threatens destruction to the whole fabric; the lady opines that "Mr. Bagshot has only hooked a weed, after all;" and, for a few moments, we are at a dead lock.

"The brute is sulky," says Joe. (Would a biped be sulky to find a silver fork in his *omelette soufflée?*) "We must wait till he moves."

Again there is a tumultuous rush under water. Joe draws him in warily and gradually; a white side appears for an instant above the surface; I make sundry ineffectual thrusts with the landing-net; the 'Squire swears; Mrs. Montague laughs; and everybody speaks at once. Luckily, the boat is anything but what is termed "crank;" so, notwithstanding all our endeavours, we cannot upset her; and, as the 'Squire snatches the net from my unskilful hand, amidst Joe's expostulations, and Mrs. Montague's entreaties to "be quick," I tumble over the neglected oars, and find myself prostrate in the bottom of the boat, alongside of an enormous, struggling monster, two feet and

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a-half in length, and fourteen pounds' weight (angler's measure and computation), whose ghastly maw, grinning defiance with its double set of sharp-pointed teeth, stamps him carnivorous and cruel as his negro-fed prototype of the tropical ocean. Then, what exultation and satisfaction! what reciprocal compliments on our mutual skill, and expressions of wonder and admiration at the size of the fish! The 'Squire votes it high time for luncheon; and we propel the craft, not without difficulty, to a commodious landing-place. The hamper is unpacked, the corks are drawn; with the green sward for our table-cloth, and the blue vault for our canopy, we revel like so many fairies at their elfin banquet; and when Mrs. Montague Forbes warbles forth, in a voice of which she has complete control, one of our plaintive old English ditties, even her brother acknowledges that "we should not have got on half so well without Nelly;" whilst I feel in my innermost heart that a wilderness like this, "with one such spirit as my minister," or, in other words, continual pic-nics in the society of the Nelly aforesaid, would be rapture indeed!

Thus the time glided pleasantly on, and

summer gave place to autumn, fishing and cricket to dog-breaking and partridge-shooting, without my seeming to note the length of my visit at the Parsonage, or making another important discovery as to the influence of the neighbouring enslaver whose society it was that made the days speed like hours, the weeks like days. A dream can scarcely be called such till the moment of waking renders us conscious of the illusion; and I might have lingered on in my friend Joe's house for months and years without ever taking myself to task as to *what* was the attraction that made the little west-country snuggery so delightful, had it not been for a sudden summons which called my landlord from his home, and rendered it impossible for me to remain longer in the house during the absence of its master. We had returned, the previous evening, from a delightful fishing excursion to a reservoir at some distance, where we had been more than usually successful, and as we drove home, full of plans for future amusements, and anticipation of additional field-sports, nothing was further from the ideas of either of us than the immediate separation of the pair. The post, however, takes no denial; and the very next morning

Joe received a letter from a certain aunt of his, residing at Bath, summoning him immediately to her presence in that salubrious city, to manage some trivial matters that, to an invalided spinster, appeared of the very greatest importance.

The aunt was elderly and rich; Joe was her only near relation, and it would have been fatal to refuse. A neighbouring clergyman was happy to oblige so popular a character, by taking his professional duties for a time, and the only difficulty that presented itself to my friend, was what he called "behaving so badly to his guest." With his usual hospitality, he was anxious that I should remain installed at the parsonage till his return; but as his aunt's letter hinted an absence of some weeks would be necessary, this was an arrangement to which I could not consent. There was nothing for it, we thought, but a mutual start; and an early hour was fixed for our departure on the morrow, that we might travel together as far as our diverse routes—his for Bath and mine for London—would allow. This point settled, every thing assumed a sadly leave-taking aspect; the parsonage looked prettier, the garden more blooming, and the path towards Topthorne

Lodge more attractive than ever. The latter direction I sought in vain for an excuse to take; but with a nervous shyness that ought to have made me sensible of my danger, I studiously avoided making any proposal to Joe, as to the propriety of our paying our friends a farewell visit. Luncheon time arrived, and I was still as far as ever from my object, when Bagshot exclaimed, as if the thought had suddenly struck him over his glass of sherry, "I had almost forgotten, Nogo; upon my word we ought to call on Topthorne and his sister before we start." As may be supposed, I was nothing loath, and in less than an hour we were ushered into Squire Topthorne's drawing-room.

"Master was at the kennel," the servant informed us, with that accurate knowledge of his employer's whereabout that a servant thinks it right to affect; "but Mrs. Forbes was in the drawing-room; would we step that way?"

We stepped into the drawing-room accordingly, where we found that graceful lady busied in arranging a whole wheelbarrow-full of flowers which she had just brought in from the garden, in fragrant profusion. There she stood in the full glare of the sunshine, fresh and radiant as Flora herself. None of your darkened rooms,

and sitting with the window at her back, so much affected by ladies of a certain age, whose bloom will not bear the scrutiny of what they call a "cross light." Widow though she was, and turned of forty, if she was a day, Mrs. Montague could still boast a complexion that might have vied with Hebe herself; and we are not to suppose that she was unconscious of this inestimable attraction, or loath to display it to the greatest advantage. Our greetings were brief and cordial, and the melancholy cause of our visit explained.

"Going away?" said the fair widow, and I could have sworn she turned a shade paler as she spoke; "and so soon! We shall miss you both very much. You will quite forget the West, Mr. Nogo, when you get back to London;" and the look which accompanied this remark brought my heart into my mouth.

What I should have replied I know not, doubtless something very incoherent and nonsensical; but fortunately for my presence of mind, the Squire at that moment swaggered into the room. Rough and uncouth as he was, want of hospitality could never be laid to Mr. Topthorne's charge; and ere our errand was well explained, I had received and accepted

a cordial invitation to spend the remainder of what he called "my summer vacation" at the lodge.

"You'll dine with us to-day, Bagshot," said he, in his usual abrupt and off-hand manner: "Nogo needn't go back at all. I'll send the trap down for your things; and in the mean time, if you'll come with me, you shall see the hounds fed."

There are some men whom nobody ever thinks of contradicting, who settle everything for others as well as themselves; and who, by a certain "brusquerie" of manner and decision in trifles gain an ascendancy over their fellow-creatures that real abilities often fail to obtain. Such was Topthorne. I never could find out that he had more acuteness, more judgment, or more determination than his neighbours; and yet, was there a knotty point to be solved —a difference of opinion amongst his brother magistrates as to the legality of a committal without evidence, or a dispute between his fellow-sportsmen upon the respective merits of their dogs and horses—he was always respected as an authority, and referred to as an arbitrator. In the hunting-field, as I afterwards discovered, he was looked upon as a

second Solomon. If Topthorne said the hounds "never went any pace," vain was the evidence of scattered riders and sobbing steeds—of panting hounds, who, having raced their victim through a burst that turned him up in the open at the end of two-and-twenty minutes, now lapped and bayed alternately round the gallant fox who sealed his testimony to the pace with his blood. Vain, even, was the unanswerable evidence of the "compasses" applied to that depreciating Ordnance map, on whose disenchanting surface the deeds of modern Nimrods dwindle into contempt—the achievement that over "the mahogany" swells into an exploit worthy of the days of chivalry, becomes, when subjected to this uncompromising test, a mere "constitutional canter," unworthy of the name of a run. But talking equestrians, foxes' brushes, and surveyors' measurements, were all equally futile in the opinion of the Pippingdon Hunt when opposed to the fiat of their Master; and he must have been, indeed, a bold man who would have ventured to appeal to the testimony of his own eyesight against the assumed knowledge of the dictatorial Squire. True, he did not ride particularly forward;

and his style of going being what they call in Yorkshire "not very venturesome," he was generally upon the skirts of a quick thing, his presence at the end of which was more due to his knowledge of the country than the use he had made of his horse. But then he could tell you what hound was leading during every part of the run; and from your ignorance of the names of the pack, to say nothing of the extra eye required for individualizing that streaming body which it requires all your energies and intellects to keep in view, your own natural orbits being fully employed in choosing your ground and scanning your fences—with these drawbacks, I say, although in Leicestershire phrase you may have "had the best of it every yard," I defy you to contradict him. In a word, to give him his due, he was unapproachable: his ear, never at fault, told him in an instant the direction his hounds were taking; and when sound failed to guide him, he seemed to have an intuitive knowledge of the intentions of his fox. Though a moderate rider, he was doubtless a thorough sportsman; perhaps all the more so from his want of that "dash" which, however indispensable to the hound, is a qualification not so desirable

in the impatient throng mounted and assembled to pursue that sagacious animal, and whose headlong gallantry, merciful by mistake, saves the life of many a fox, as it destroys the equanimity of many a master.

But to return to the Squire. For my own part I would much rather have remained in the cool, fragrant drawing-room, doing the agreeable to his handsome sister, than have accompanied him to the odours of a boiling-house, and the fiery ordeal of those scorched flags, which paved his gloomy kennel. But I never dreamed of resistance: as the Squire said, so must it be; and with a rueful glance at the widow, and an envious look at Joe, whose immediate attention was required by some parish business, I followed my leader up the shady winding path, which led to the low detached buildings honoured by the residence of the Pippingdon Hounds; and conspicuous like all other kennels for a huge and hideous weathercock, which from June to January, probably out of compliment to the time-honoured "Billesdon Coplow run," pointed without deviation due north-east! "There's music for you," said Topthorne, as an unearthly yowling proclaimed the vicinity of his

darlings; "to a sportsman like yourself, hounds are more interesting at this time of year than in December. I think I can show you a rare entry;" and trudging past a bare paddock, in which an equine skeleton was awaiting his doom—though what there would be to eat upon him, when slaughtered, excited my curiosity—we arrived at the kennel door, garnished with innumerable noses, which the Squire called "masks," heretofore owned by the gallant foxes of the west; and further guarded, with superstitious care, by the witch-defying horse-shoe. "Mind that bitch, she has got a litter," said the Squire, as an ill-favoured old vixen, with one eye, came snuffing round the calves of my legs, but ill-protected by a pair of thin summer trowsers. "Go home, Venus," he added; and Venus, not liking me on a closer inspection, was content to depart without perpetrating an assault, just as the factotum of the establishment thrust his shock head through the kennel door, and disappeared again like lightning, to furnish us with the customary long coats and heavy-thonged whips, necessary defences against undue familiarity or unprovoked aggression.

"Ike," as this worthy's baptismal appella-

tion of "Isaac" was universally abbreviated, deserves a few words of notice as an original in his way, and a servant of that accommodating kind which is, unfortunately, seldom to be met with in crack establishments. He was originally a denizen of middle earth, being, as he himself said, "bred and born down a coal-mine;" but had attracted the Squire's attention by his irrepressible fondness for the chase, and the enthusiastic manner in which he acted on foot as an amateur whipper-in. A vacancy occurring, he was put into the establishment, and by degrees became the most useful and influential personage about the place. Kennel huntsman, feeder, first and second whip—all these multifarious duties were fulfilled by "Ike;" and with the assistance of one boy, as idle a young dog as ever went unpunished, he represented the whole staff, which with the Pytchley or Quorn would consist of at least five individuals. In the field his utility was no less apparent, and true to the destiny of his kind, he "played many parts." When the Squire was "to the front," "Ike" shone conspicuous as the quickest of "first whips." When, as often happened, the servant was "there," and the master only "thereabouts,"

he slipped with ease into the character of a huntsman, occasionally rating the astonished pack to his own holloa, and in that capacity showed a knowledge of the craft unsurpassed by many of far higher pretensions than this natural and self-taught sportsman. He was ever thinking of his hounds, never of his horse, and was a living instance, with an unbroken neck, of the powers enjoyed by that animal when not hampered by the assistance of his rider. To say that "Ike" was a good horseman would be absurd; to call him a bad one would be unfair. The fact is, he was *no horseman at all.* With a short, broad-shouldered figure, and a pair of sturdy bow-legs, encased in the "drabbest" of cords and brownest of "tops," he sat anywhere and everywhere upon his saddle that happened to be most convenient at the moment; and, thus liberally disposing his weight (by no means a trifling one), he seemed to think he had done all that was required as his share in the partnership. His "bridle-hand" was formed entirely on the principle of "non-intervention;" and no horse could well go on pulling at him, as he never gave him an opportunity by taking hold of his head. His rein was usually loose on his horse's

withers, and in this form he rode at every description of fence in a cramped and awkward country. His nerve, of course, was undeniable; and, to give an idea of it, I may mention an instance which occurred when he was drawing a gorse covert with his hounds, on a violent four-year-old, which the Squire had entrusted to him to "make." The young one, naturally disliking the prickly covert through which he was forced, went on "bucking" and jumping in a manner that would have unseated many horsemen, and destroyed the equanimity of most. Not so with "Ike." He sat perfectly unconcerned, "yoaxing" and cheering his hounds, and scarcely deigning to touch his bridle-rein or pay the slightest attention to the four-year-old, till, in the course of his vagaries, the latter found himself directly above the shaft of a worked-out coal-pit, half-concealed amongst the gorse; and, taking the bit between his teeth, he cleared it at a bound. The horse jumped a considerable distance; but, on alighting, detached some of the brick with his hind-legs, the crumbling portions of which, as they rattled into the "profound," struck terror into the hearts of those who witnessed the awful feat. How did "Ike" acknowledge his escape?

Turning the young one round, as if he was merely giving him a lesson in leaping at a common fence, he exclaimed, "Is *that* the slovenly way you do it? You *theatrical* beggar, I'll teach you better manners than that!" and, ramming both spurs into his sides, he *jumped it again!*

Such was the character whom I now saw for the first time on my introduction to the Pippingdon Hounds.

CHAPTER IV.

"My hounds are bred out of the Spartan kind—
So flew'd, so sanded ; and their heads are hung
With ears that sweep away the morning dew ;
Crook kneed and dew-lapped, like Thessalian bulls ;
Slow in pursuit, but matched in mouth like bells—
Each under each. A cry more tuneable
Was never halloa'd to, nor cheered with horn."

Midsummer Night's Dream.

As the kennel-door opened, and I stepped into the savoury precincts of Mr. Topthorne's hunting establishment, my first feeling was one of thankfulness to that prudence and foresight, which had supplied me with a long-skirted upper garment, something like a weather-beaten dressing-gown, and a formidable weapon for repressive measures, in the shape of a most efficient hunting-whip ; not the light,

cane-shafted, silver-mounted gimcrack with which the dandy "customer" of "the shires" condescends to open those propitious hand-gates, which make his ox-feeding and black-thorn-fenced country practicable to man and horse, but a huge and ponderous weapon, iron-handled, and heavy-thonged, with a punishing power that can cut "old Benedict" into ribbons, and a crack like the report of a pistol. Nor was my gratitude for such protection misplaced, for no sooner had the Squire put his foot over the threshold of their habitation than an immediate rush of four-and-twenty couple of working hounds, mostly dogs, square of head, and large of limb, deep, long, thick-throated, and tough-skinned, threatened to carry us clean off our legs into the middle of the coming hunting season. "Get over, Trueboy! Have a care, Bellman! Back, hounds! back!" accompanied by a sweep of Ike's professional hunting-whip, modified the first eager demonstrations of his favourites, and gave the master space to descant upon the different ornaments of his kennel. Topthorne, though on ordinary occasions a man of few words, had a surprising flow of eloquence upon the one subject which most deeply interested him, and,

under the impression that he had got hold of a brother enthusiast, he now opened out voluminously.

"The lot you see here, Nogo, are the whole of my working hounds; twenty-four couple of dogs and bitches, and they come out three days a-week, and a bye-day when required. 'Plenty of flesh, and plenty of work,' is my motto. 'Well-clothed ribs, empty bellies, blood and whipcord;' and, though I say it, that should not, no hounds in England can carry a better head when working, or come home fresher after a heavy, tiring day. Put 'em over, Ike; how long does it want to feeding time?"

Ike consults a huge warming-pan, which he drags up by a tiny key from the recesses of his brown cords, and correcting its report by a solar observation, replies—

"About an hour and a-half, zur!"

So that I am evidently in for it! The Squire's face brightens as he remarks—

"We shall have plenty of time to draft the young ones 'by litters,' and then the whole of them one by one." What a prospect for a summer's afternoon! "It is so seldom I find a man that really *cares for hounds*, that it is

quite a pleasure to get a sportsman like yourself into the kennel; so we will go through them regularly," proceeds the unrelenting Squire; and, disarmed by this undeserved compliment, I am compelled to submit, and with suppressed yawns and feigned interest I go through the enforced ordeal.

First we have "Reveller," and "Rantipole," and "Ruby," by the Duke of Beaufort's "Ragman," out of "our Red-rose." And the great sprawling brutes, combining the playfulness of puppyism with the weight of maturity, disturb me in a brown study about the widow, by nearly knocking me down. After a minute inspection, this "promising litter" are dismissed to give place to "Galloper" and "Ganymede," by Mr. Horlock's "Bondsman," out of "Gertrude;" and as there is a doubt as to which of these great white monsters is to be kept, they are submitted to a close survey for the establishment of their claims to superiority. "Galloper" is a little "throaty," but then he is the larger limbed of the two, against which "Ganymede" is declared to be the image of old "Gertrude" about the head (who must have been an exceedingly forbidding, not to say ferocious-looking animal), and I remark

that Ike inclines, if anything, towards the canine cup-bearer. The Squire at last appeals to me, and, taking the chance of the servant being in all probability a better judge than the master, I unhesitatingly declare in favour of "Ganymede." By degrees we get through the entry, and arrive at the drafts. Here I find it somewhat difficult to preserve my assumed character as a judge of the animal, for even to my inexperienced eye it is evident that the symmetry and appearance of these "pickings from other packs" will not counteract the latent evil qualities for which they have left their respective homes; however, it is always safe to abuse a draft, if such abuse be properly tempered, by comparison with the receiving establishment; and when I condemned a lame, crooked-legged, overgrown brute, called "Watchman," as only fit to be hanged, the Squire and Ike, with admiration pourtrayed upon their countenances, sentenced him forthwith. I know not how long I could have kept up the deception, but I confess to having been overjoyed when the time for release came without my ignorance of the subject being discovered by the Squire. I thought once or twice I could perceive a look of comic malice

on Ike's rough features as he asked my opinion about this puppy or that bitch; but if he had any suspicions of my imposture he kept them to himself, and when feeding time arrived, and I stood complacently at the troughs, and suffered my boots to be trodden on, and my lower habiliments soiled by the slobbering gluttons, as they unwillingly relinquished their hasty meal, I could not but see that I was winning golden opinions from my enthusiastic host. He put his arm within mine as we returned to the house; and when the dressing-bell rang, and I proceeded with more than usual care to make my evening toilet, my head was dizzy, and my ears rang with a confused jumble of "Champion" and "Marygold," "Wanton" and "Wilful," "Guardsman" and "Graceless," "legs and feet," "backs and loins," "capital timber," "famous in his back-ribs," "deep about his heart," and "a lengthy, lashing-looking young hound."

As I descended the stairs, in hopes of a five minutes' *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Montague Forbes ere the dinner-bell should summon us to table, I had an opportunity of judging of the former tastes and pursuits of the Topthornes, by the different pictures and articles of curiosity which

adorned the hall and landing-place. Sportsmen they seemed to have been one and all, to judge from the pictorial subjects and other trophies which covered the walls. Uncouth representations of Newmarket in the olden time, ere Frank Grant and Landseer were born, before the pencil of an Alken and the brush of a Herring had done justice to the make and shape of the noblest of animals, displayed a series of wooden-legged rocking-horses, with short square tails, apparently just taken from the plough, to be ridden in military style, at a slow canter, by individuals in cocked hats, periwigs, and jack-boots. How unlike the "run in for the Derby," which in the present day attracts its crowd of theoretic sportsmen at every print-shop window! Interspersed with these purchases of some turf-affecting ancestor was a variety of smaller portraits, showing how the favourite hunter, in his snaffle-bridle, was used to jump his gates standing, in the presence of a numerous pack of hounds running over a flower-enamelled sward, that suggested the month of June as being in those good old times the most favourable season for the chase. Here and there was a full-length representation of a former Top-

thorne, long since demised, delineated with a lofty disregard for drawing, and a bold taste in colours, as attired in bright-yellow breeches, brown top boots, a grass-green coat, and a flowing peruke. Even the ladies of the family, the ancestral housewives, who had fulfilled their destiny of "suckling Topthornes and chronicling small beer," seemed to have been ambitious of being handed down to posterity in a manner befitting the wives and mothers of a race of Nimrods; and for one that was clad as a long-waisted shepherdess, holding a posy of flowers to her bosom, there must have been half-a-dozen attired in Spanish hats and buxom riding-habits; nay, in a solitary audacious instance, a masculine dame of the time of the Restoration was actually pourtrayed seated upon a black horse "*en cavalier*," and protected in this now unusual attitude by a style of dress which, thanks to our sisters on the other side of the Atlantic, we are likely to see adopted ere long by the more ambitious portion of the sex in this country.

Beneath these family pictures, glass-cases contained representations of the different beasts of chase, on which the originals of the portraits had during their lifetime exercised their prowess.

There they were, cunningly stuffed to ape real life, and infinitely better resemblances of nature than the specimens of the limner's art. Pied badgers were plodding on, in their side-long canter; and lithe, twisting otters grinning up at you with their death-snarl of defiance. An amiable-looking fox, with bright brown eyes, appeared to be caressing a prostrate pheasant, whose plumage was fresh and radiant, as if he had just fluttered away his life by the side of some leafless spinny; whilst harmless hares, in the old conventional attitudes, the one eating, the other sitting up, gazed at you with a placid expression of listless wonder, far different from the startled glance with which the last you killed regarded your retriever after you had tailored her by shooting "too far behind."

Such and such-like were the decorations of the staircase, down which I now descended into a comfortable and well-carpeted hall, not too large for a sitting-room, and in which the Squire kept his guns, fishing-rods, landing-nets, hunting-whips, sticks, umbrellas, hats, gloves, and camp-stools—everything, in short, which could be wanted at a moment's notice; and the fire-place of which was the general

rendezvous of every one staying in the house previous to all expeditions of sport or amusement. The different apartments, dining-room, drawing-room, and billiard-room, all opened into the hall, and vied in comfort and snugness with that centre of the whole. Library there was none; nor did the Squire's tastes and habits render such an addition to his occupations by any means necessary.

In his own sanctum he possessed "Beckford," "Colonel Cooke," "White's Farriery," "Burns' Justices," and "Colonel Hawker's Advice to Young Sportsmen;" and with this wealth of literature he was completely satisfied. His sister, who subscribed to the circulating library at Weatherley, generally had two or three new novels in the drawing-room, and I never yet heard any of the visitors complain of want of books.

The outside of Topthorne Lodge was in accordance with its inner arrangements: no pretensions to architectural style or ornamental appearance, but everything sacrificed—no bad plan in a country house—to thorough comfort and convenience. It dated from the Elizabethan era, but in all probability scarcely any part of the original fabric which stood in "the

golden days of good Queen Bess" was now left entire. Different proprietors had improved, added, taken away, and altered, according to their several ideas of necessity and comfort; so that the Lodge, as it was called, in consequence of some ancient rights of forestry which it conferred upon its occupant, was now a long, low, irregular pile of building, with winding staircases, and quaint ins-and-outs—an exterior that was in admirable keeping with the thoroughly English scenery, the towering oaks and broad meadows, that surrounded its walls; and an interior in which any gentleman not gifted with the bump of locality would be safe to lose himself at least twice a-day, during the first week of his domiciliation, in its puzzling passages and corresponding galleries.

Trusting to chance and a stray servant to conduct me to the drawing-room, I pursued my way leisurely from my own chamber, alternately making my remarks on surrounding objects, and glancing down with no small satisfaction on the suit of sables, in which, with a white tie, it is considered decorous to appear amongst your fellow-creatures at feeding time.

"Could we but see ourselves as others see us" would be, like most faculties which are wisely denied us, a very disagreeable acquisition. As it is, each man is satisfied that he has in himself some peculiarity of attraction which his neighbours must eventually discover. Did you ever know a big, bloated, bagman-looking fellow, with a face like a furnace, and a frame like an ox, that did not delude himself into the idea that he was "a remarkably fine man?" or, on the other hand, was there ever a puny, half-grown, wasted, bilious-looking figure, that did not console itself with the conviction that it bore the impress of patrician birth and gentleman-like breeding on its attenuated proportions? I presume I am no wiser than my neighbours Certainly, taking Jack Raffleton or Segundo as the type of male beauty—and I never heard it denied by any one that both are peculiarly handsome men—my face and form, which are as different as possible from either of them, must be far removed from the standard of perfection to which we are all anxious to approach. I was an ugly boy at school, but I am much altered since then—possibly for the better; and altogether I am content to take the opinion

of my tailor, who says I have a "*genteel figure for a surtout,*" and whom I am fain to believe, although he can never complete a coat for me without a dozen alterations, and was once heard to say, with regard to a pair of leathers (my property), that drove him out of all patience by their obstinacy, "We can make *breeches*, sir; but we cannot really make *legs!*"

However, on the evening in question, I felt that if Mrs. Montague Forbes' opinion of my "*tout ensemble*" was anything like that which I myself entertained, her fate was sealed. The widow must succumb, and surrender at discretion. Accordingly, I marched boldly to the attack. I took her in to dinner (I was the only visitor), I drank wine with her, and talked and flirted, and told second-hand London stories—as good as new in the West; and when the time came for her to leave her brother and myself to our bottle of old port, her look, as she rustled out of the room, said plainly as words could speak—"Don't stay prosing here about your horses, but come as quick as you can to coffee and music in the drawing-room."

Old port twenty years in bottle is a fluid

which may safely stand upon its own merits, without fear of neglect; and it is astonishing how its influence adds to the conversational powers of your companion, not only by conferring eloquence upon his periods, but by soothing you into a state of complacency highly advantageous to a listener. A gentleman who can talk to you for an hour without ceasing, upon the merits and pedigrees of his hounds, interspersed with problematical anecdotes of their sagacity, and diffuse commentaries on the nature and uncertainty of scent, would hardly be considered an amusing companion, if lending his assistance to the consumption of a decanter full of toast-and-water, or a jug of iced lemonade; but let him fill his glass to the brim with the dry, full-flavoured, ruby stream which, he assures you in parenthesis, has been in his cellar since he came of age—not forgetting at the same time to push the bottle across the table with an injunction "to help yourself"—let him smack his lips as he sets down his empty goblet, and look as if he was going to ring the bell, and order "the other bottle," and you feel convinced that his eloquence is equal to that of Cicero or Demosthenes, and are ready and willing to undergo

the ordeal of another story longer than the last, upon the understanding that it shall be accompanied by a fresh supply of that liquid alchemy which "turns his words to gold." So was it with the Squire: he had got a listener upon the only subject he loved to talk about, and he made good use of him.

Ere the second bottle was done, I could have passed a very fair examination on the system of kennel management in the Pippingdon establishment, and could have told to a fraction how much meal they consumed in a week, and how many pounds of horseflesh each of these interesting animals stowed away as his own proper share in a twelvemonth. What a relief it was to swagger into the drawing-room, and make love to the widow! to drink the coffee she poured out with her own fair hands, and to feel established at once as one of the family, when the Squire, according to custom, went fast asleep in his high-backed chair, and I rendered my valuable assistance in the winding-off of a skein of much-tangled silk, assuming the imposing attitude of a bear dancing on his hind legs, and holding out my paws for the reception of the confusing web! If not the most commodious, this is certainly

the most agreeable method of preparing silk for immediate use. But alas for the resources of the human mind! — the conversational powers of a gentleman are most unfairly taxed when he finds himself the only visitor amongst a family party, and as of course they have got nothing to say to each other, when he finds he is called upon to supply topics and small-talk for all. I had exhausted most of my conversation at the dinner-table, and although now in the enviable situation of commanding the widow's ear, I really had nothing to say. We got through "the weather," and "her garden," very fast—the fading roses, the lovely walks, the surrounding scenery, and the quaint old house—when my good genius prompted me to ask a question seldom, in so old a building, replied to in the negative—

"Have you a haunted room here?"

"Do you believe in ghosts?" was the counter-interrogative, "for, if you do, I won't tell you the story—it is too alarming!"

Of course I expressed my utter incredulity in those unwelcome visitants, and with but little persuasion Mrs. Montague proceeded to relate the following legend connected with the Topthorne family in the olden time. The hour

and scene were well calculated to do justice to a ghost-story: one of the lamps had gone out, and the room was in that state of semi-obscurity which is so much more gloomy than actual darkness; the rising wind sighed in the trees around the house; the Squire, fast asleep in his chair, breathed audibly without disturbing us by a snore; and Mrs. Montague, with her drooping ringlets and large serious eyes, told her story in those low, eager tones which go straight to the listener's heart; and thus it ran:—

"Many years ago, during the reign of Charles the Second, and when the gloomy and rigid manners of the Protectorate had given place to the roistering habits of the new *régime*, an ancestor of ours, one Miles Topthorne, was the proprietor of the Lodge. Miles had served with the Cavaliers in the Civil Wars, and had added to the natural profligacy of his disposition the wild habits of recklessness so much affected by that party. There is a picture of him in the hall—a handsome, dissipated-looking man, with a bad expression of countenance, to which the artist has done ample justice. He was no better than he looked: he broke his wife's heart, and drove his daughter

from her home by the disgraceful orgies in which he took delight; and even at this distance of time, the Lodge has scarcely recovered the bad character it bore throughout the surrounding country, for vice and debauchery. Amongst other perilous amusements, it was his delight to rise at midnight from his revels, accompanied by his graceless companions, and hunt the deer with hound and horn throughout the surrounding forest, during the hours of darkness, scaring the solitary cottages that he passed, and making the ignorant peasants believe in him as a supernatural being, something akin to the Wild Huntsman of German romance. There is a chasm within a few miles of here, that is called 'Topthorne's Leap' to this day; and the common people believe that 'Mad Miles,' as they called him, accomplished the dangerous feat of clearing the precipice by moonlight. It was supposed—and the legend is so handed down to the present time—that 'Mad Miles' was not unaccompanied by supernatural assistance in these perilous expeditions. Stories were afloat of his having been seen preceded by a shadowy form on a black horse; and wherever his spirit-leader rode, there was Miles bound to follow, and thence he still

emerged unhurt. Boon companions, who had accompanied him on these wild flights, had been known, on their return weary and exhausted with the midnight chase, to declare that they had seen Miles and 'another' far before them in the moonlight, when they had abandoned the unsuccessful pursuit, and to enquire of each other, with blank visages, as to which of their number had so far distanced his competitors. The answers were never satisfactory; but then, to be sure, men who hunt in the dark after supper are not likely to give a very clear account of their proceedings. But, unfortunately, the Topthorne of that day did not confine his vagaries to these moonlight rides. He was the terror of all whose families could boast of beauty, and who valued their good name. His assignations with the damsels of the surrounding district have given the name of 'Lover's Oak' to a huge old tree at the further end of what is now the park; and, amongst others in whose ears he poured his tale of treachery and falsehood, was Alice Torwood, daughter of his sub-forester (for Miles, like his fathers, was keeper of the forest), and commonly called 'The Lily of the Lea.' His advances were long received with scorn and

horror by the high-minded maiden; but the cavalier, accustomed to consult only his own ungoverned passions, thought little of using force where persuasion was of no avail, and 'The Lily' was carried off at midnight from her father's house. She was brought to the Lodge a raving maniac. Tied upon his powerful horse, behind her captor, who shall describe the horrors of that dark, desperate gallop! In her incoherent lamentations, she raved of a demon-form that had pursued her on a fiery black horse; of a frightful chasm, over which Miles had urged his steed, to escape from his unearthly companion; of rivers of blood, through which they had waded—and sure enough, when she arrived at the Lodge, her dress, as well as that of Miles, was stained with gore; and of fearful conflicts between her captor and the demon, waged at intervals, when the latter's superior speed enabled him to come up with the flying couple. But her words were merely regarded as the ravings of madness; and although a young forester of the district, formerly attached to Alice, was found dead in the forest, with a sabre-thrust through his heart, no inquiry, in those unsettled times, was made into the business, and Miles Top-

thorne, unsuspected and unpunished, pursued his former career of unbridled license and profligacy. In the mean time, 'The Lily' remained a close captive in one of the rooms above-stairs. Inquiries were made in every direction by her family, but no clue was ever obtained as to her whereabout; and the agony of her father, in his uncertainty as to what had become of his darling, was perhaps preferable to the knowledge of her actual fate—out of her mind, and a prisoner in the house of such a man as Miles Topthorne. But the unaccountable part of the story is to come. 'Mad Miles' was brought home one morning, after a midnight gallop, with a broken neck; nor was this a catastrophe that should have created any surprise, but, on that very night, 'The Lily' had disappeared from her prison-room, nor was she ever afterwards heard of. She may, with the cunning peculiar to maniacs, have eluded the vigilance of those employed to watch her, and, when once out of the house, have precipitated herself into one of the many ponds or streams which abound in this neighbourhood. But, be it as it may, no traces of 'The Lily' have ever yet been discovered; and many a peasant vowed that, on that fatal

night, he was woke from his sleep by the shrill blasts of a horn, mingled with piercing screams from a woman's voice, and, rushing to the window, he caught a glimpse of a hurrying cavalier, with a white figure behind him, galloping through the forest in the moonlight, and closely pursued by a shadowy form of unearthly proportions, mounted upon a huge and fiery black horse. Since then, the room that 'The Lily' occupied is supposed to be visited at full moon by sundry shrieks, groans, and mutterings; and one of our housemaids left, a few years ago, in consequence of meeting, as she declared, a white, transparent figure on the very threshold of the apartment: we now call it the Pink Dressing-room, and it opens into the Blue Bed-room—the one which you occupy. As you do not believe in ghosts, I have told you the story. Be good enough to light me a hand-candle. Good-night, Mr. Nogo! and pleasant dreams to you!"

CHAPTER V.

" A heavy summons lies like lead upon me,
And yet I cannot sleep."

Macbeth.

Dan.—" He is indeed a horse, and all other jades you may call—beasts."

Con.—" Indeed, my Lord, it is a most absolute and excellent horse."

King Henry the Fifth.

Horace recommends the sleepless Roman to swim thrice across the Tiber, and ere he seek his couch to drench his frame with wine—a classical way of rendering what we in the vernacular term " passing a wet evening." And doubtless this was good advice to the luxurious denizen of the Imperial City, unaccustomed to take sufficient exercise, and imbibing in his revels only the pure unadulterated produce of

his sunny and vine-clad hills. We gather from history that the masters of the world were claret drinkers; the size of their drinking-cups, the frequency of their toasts, their aversion to "heel-taps," which we infer from their recorded habit of striking the brim of each up-turned goblet against the thumb-nail, to show what thorough justice had been done to its contents—all these little social and convivial practices prove beyond a doubt that had "black-strap" been the particular "vanity" imbibed in such profusion, there would have been few instances of a senator *walking* to his couch; and "as drunk as Julius Cæsar," instead of being as it now is, a pleasant and classical metaphor betokening helpless inebriety, would have stood recorded, in sad if not in sober earnest, as an undoubted and historical fact. And the "other bottle" of strong port, acting upon a frame already diluted with sundry glasses of dry champagne and "curious" Madeira, doubtless produces a slumber which, if it were only long in proportion to its depth, would be refreshing to the last degree; but unfortunately ere "the cock's shrill clarion or the echoing horn" has pro-

claimed the approach of day, an unwelcome fit of vigilance overtakes the prostrate Bacchanalian, and with parched throat and aching brow he tosses to and fro upon his couch, too restless to relapse into slumber, and yet in a most unfit condition to be up and doing.

Mrs. Montague's ghost-story was buzzing in my ears when I sought my dormitory. I certainly wound up my watch, though I have no distinct recollection of extinguishing my candle; *therefore* I cannot have been the least under the influence of Bacchus: no, it was probably the salad—salad never *does* agree with me—or the coffee might have been too strong; but it clearly was not the wine that caused me to awake about three o'clock in the morning, very much heated, rather nervous, and extremely indisposed to go to sleep again.

The full moon was pouring her beams into my chamber through a chink in the shutters, and the clock in the passage, whose every tick had for some time been irritating my overstrung nerves, gave its three silvery strokes, and then went on with its aggravating "one, two," louder than before, when to my infinite discomposure I fancied I heard a slight scream

in a woman's voice. My first impulse was to put my head under the bed-clothes; but making an effort to master this not very valorous instinct, I sat up and listened! Who, that has ever gone through this performance in the middle of the night, will deny that it is, to say the least of it, the most uncomfortable method of passing the time usually devoted to repose? how the slightest sound appears magnified to an alarming degree—how every horror, of which the newspapers are always full, becomes present to the mind at once—how the boards of hitherto silent passages and deserted rooms crack, as though trodden stealthily, by ghost or robber, of no fragile weight—how the felling of apprehension merges into irritation, and *vice versâ*, till you hardly know whether you are most alarmed or provoked, and how in the midst of all these misgivings you generally drop insensibly into a disturbed slumber, from which you wake next morning, at an hour when you ought to be dressed, unrefreshed and very much ashamed of yourself. Such is the usual conclusion of a broken night's rest; but when you have been credibly informed, from lips on which you place implicit reliance, that you are actually next door to a haunted

chamber, Morpheus is more chary of his favours; and never at high noon did I feel more thoroughly broad awake than during the weary hours of the first night I spent at Topthorne Lodge.

Again that stifled scream—again that light and stealthy foot-fall passing my very door. Flesh and blood could stand it no longer; and in sheer desperation I jumped wildly out of bed and rushed into the passage, with a sort of morbid impulse, that bid me face the worst at once, and get it over.

Cold crept the night air around my defenceless limbs; for my garment was scant, and the draughts which pervaded the old house were pitiless; but the bodily discomfort I experienced was nothing, compared to the mental chill that shot through my very marrow, when at the further end of the long gloomy passage I distinctly saw a white transparent-looking figure vanish through one of those swinging green doors, so especially adapted for the exits and entrances of ghosts. Had I not been the solitary occupant of "the Visitors' Wing"—had there been another denizen of that haunted locality to rush to his chamber door in superstitious terror, I rather think I should have

frightened *him*, as I stood in the cold moonlight paralyzed with horror—my mouth open, my hair on end, my snowy drapery floating in the night breeze, and my eyes fixed with a stony glare on the disappearing spectre. But alas! I had no companion to encourage me with his bodily presence. I was alone—all alone now; for the ghost was gone: and much discomfited under the combined feelings of shame, fear, and a half suspicion that the whole might be a trick to impose upon my credulity, I again sought my couch; and at length, when the cheerful dawn made its appearance, and the "early birds" were twittering gladly to meet the approach of day, I found courage to resign myself to a heavy slumber, from which I did not awake till the sound of a great bell tolling somewhere in the neighbourhood of my bed-room announced that breakfast would be ready in that short half-hour, which argues a toilette either completed with wonderful dexterity, or else curtailed of some of its most essential forms.

The Squire said I looked "seedy;" the widow hoped I had slept well, and not been visited by the "Lily of the Lea;" and breakfast passed over without any further remark

on the disturbance of the night, which appeared not to have aroused my host or hostess.

Bolder in the daylight, and ashamed of my alarm, I thought it best to say nothing of my unwelcome visitor, though I confess that for an instant the unchivalrous thought crossed my mind, that if this sort of thing was to go on *every* night, not even the charms of Mrs. Montague Forbes' society during the day could compensate for such a life of terror; and I had better frame some excuse that might withdraw me from the dangerous neighbourhood of Topthorne Lodge and the romantic regions of the West. But the widow smiled as widows only can, and day after day saw me lingering on, a welcome guest at the rough Squire's table, a willing captive to the attractions of his sister. Occasionally as I lay awake in the Blue-room, I fancied I could hear *a* footstep stealing gently along the passage; but after a brief struggle with my pride, I generally buried my head beneath the bed-clothes, and emerged again hot and breathless, when I imagined the apparition must have passed away; and whether it was the old port, or the country air, or more probably the healthy out-of-doors life I was leading, I know not; but I found that alto-

gether I slept passably well, and my quarters agreed with me amazingly.

Day after day glided away, and found me still a visitor at the Lodge. Friends came and went, and seemed to consider me as one of the family. Partridges got wild, pheasant-shooting began, cub-hunting became less and less gothic in its hours, and instead of six o'clock, I used to mount the Squire's roughest pony, always very much at my service, and hie to the fast mellowing woods at half-past nine.

I like cub-hunting: it is a sort of earnest of the delights about to be produced by the coming season; and if, as moralists tell us, the charm of pleasure lies chiefly in its anticipation, how much greater must be the satisfaction of the chase (particularly as you need not ride over the fences) when every day brings it nearer and nearer to its perfection, than when the drying winds of spring have parched the soil, the gaps been made up, stiff and plashed, and as high as a man's chin, and everything, from the staring coats of your hounds to the battered legs of your hunter, warns you that the end of your favourite sport is near at hand!

Well, November was approaching, and still

I was at the Topthorne's. No intelligence arrived from Bagshot, and to the Squire's pressing invitation to remain until his return, and begin "the season" in the west, what could I reply but a grateful affirmative? And yet it all seemed like a dream—what with shooting, and fishing, and flirting; pic-nics, when the weather was fine; driving with Mrs. Montague in her pretty pony-carriage with its quiet pony (for Mrs. M. was too timid to mount a horse, gentle creature!) when it was doubtful; and playing at battledore and shuttlecock with her when it was rainy; the time glided by in peaceful happiness—all the more insidious for its tranquillity. Reader! have you ever played battledore and shuttlecock across a billiard-table, with maid, wife, or widow—especially the latter? If you never have, take my advice and don't try—"Where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise!" And should you wish to escape the common doom of your sex—to live and die unfettered by the matrimonial tether, unscathed by Hymen's torch; unimprisoned within his magic ring; a free man from tears and *trousseaux*, gauze and gossips, bother and bride-cake—then take your diversion at bowls with the parson; at

skittles with the gamekeeper; aye! even at *écarté* with the Frenchman; but don't play battledore and shuttlecock with a lady. Need I add how the danger is enhanced when the said lady, in addition to her opportunities of fascination as an inhabitant of the same dwelling with yourself, is possessed of a rounded figure and a beautiful arm, shown to their greatest advantage as she strikes the winged mischief-maker high into air; a fresh complexion, deepened into a rosy hue by the exercise and *the pursuit;* and long sunny ringlets that droop over the prostrate shuttlecock, in playful despair, as she picks it up with a ringing laugh at "her own stupidity," and declares it is "so provoking we *cannot* keep it up above a hundred and twenty!" Such was my lot; and strange to say I wilfully shut my eyes to the danger, and still played on. I have often wondered whether the late Mr. Montague Forbes was an adept at this game, and whether this was the method adopted to capture that austere and puritanical gentleman (for such I have been given to understand was his character): probably if not so, some other equally efficient snare was prepared, and the bait—

like that of a sagacious keeper—was adapted to the nature of the vermin to be entrapped. Well, as I have already said, the time slipped on merrily enough, and that important epoch, the first Monday in November, was rapidly approaching. I had decided to remain with the Squire at least till Christmas, and abandoning all visions of distinction in "the shires" —all ambition of shining amongst the daring dandies from Melton, or effecting a brilliant escape from the crowd of infuriated centaurs who periodically override the Pytchley Hounds, I had resolved to go deeply into the science of the thing, and have a good spell of wild hunting in a wild country with Squire Topthorne and the Pippingdon Hounds. The master was delighted, as masters always are with the compliment implied by a desertion of other hunting establishments in favour of their own, and kindly offered to put me in the way of obtaining the material for enjoyment, in the shape of two good useful nags, at the lowest possible expenditure.

"Maggs is the only fellow to deal with," said the Squire: "I bought old 'Blunderbuss' of Maggs. I'll tell you what, Nogo—we'll go

over to 'the Paddocks' the day after to-morrow, and see what he has got."

When the Squire said a thing should be done, I always remarked that done it was; and accordingly a soft, mellow morning towards the close of October saw Topthorne and myself leisurely progressing in his sister's pony-carriage towards the picturesque abode of the west-country horse-dealer. Mrs. Forbes's old pony was a favourite, and not used to be hurried; so we had ample time to enjoy the beautiful scenery through which we passed. How unlike, in its romantic confusion of hill and dale, wood, water, and open moor, to the flat surface, the large grass enclosures, and the trim regular hedgerows, which I had been taught to associate in my mind with the enjoyment of the chase. It was a scene to have enraptured Poussin; though old Goosey would probably have passed it by in disgust, for he could scarcely have made the same remark upon its merits with which he replied to the inquiries of his last kind-hearted and liberal master, as to what he thought of the wonders of the metropolis. From his attic in Piccadilly he had looked with a sportsman's

eye over the surrounding expanse, and although he had come up from Leicestershire for the express purpose of seeing all that was most worth seeing in the great centre of civilization, his characteristic answer of "Take leave to say, Sir R., there seems a good deal of grass in the place!" shows what was the subject that, even in the modern Babylon, lay nearest to the veteran's heart. But the country through which the old pony dragged us so leisurely was as unlike the pastures of Ranksborough as the surface of the Green Park. Here we skirted a rugged copse, hanging its rich autumnal foliage over the lane we followed; there we forded a rivulet brawling down from a bluff and rocky slope, which almost deserved the name of a mountain. At every turn in the road we came upon some fresh object of varied beauty; and at length, embosomed in a secluded valley, through the level sward of which a tempting trout-stream stole silently along, we arrived at a quaint old-fashioned public-house, bearing the somewhat unaccountable title of "The Goat in Boots," and adorned with a cunning representation of that animal in such unusual attire—whence, after sundry

coercive measures to prevail upon the unwilling pony to pass that well-known resort, a few hundred yards brought us up to the unpretending line of stabling, and comfortable though lowly dwelling known as "The Paddocks, Tiverley," and much frequented by the Pippingdon sportsmen in their dealings with Mr. Maggs.

The arrival of even our modest equipage created an immediate commotion in the establishment; and with a sort of "Guard, turn-out!" alacrity, the myrmidons of Mr. Maggs became instantaneously on the alert, as though one and all scented a customer. A red-armed damsel, brandishing a frying-pan, peeped forth from the kitchen; a stunted ostler, with bandy legs and one eye, received the reins from the Squire with a kind of silent reverence that showed his veneration for the office of a master of hounds, and patted the pony as if it were an old acquaintance; while the proprietor himself, emerging from a loose box, with a straw in his mouth, and a bustling air of giving many directions at once, peculiar to horse-dealers, masters of hotels, and other functionaries whose time hangs heavy on their hands, lifted his hat in rapid succession to his visitors,

marking by the tone of his different greetings, "Good-morning, Squire!" and "Your servant, sir!" the different estimation in which he held a chance customer, and an old patron.

"Will you walk round the stables this morning, gentlemen?" says Mr. Maggs, in an off-hand sort of manner, as if we had *not* come for that especial purpose. "Naylus!" (a west-country abbreviation for Cornelius) "open that box! Horses look ill at this time of year; but it is *beau*tiful weather, certainly, for the country. Have you had much sport with the gun, Squire?"

And thus Mr. Maggs runs on, as if it were imperative on him to find conversation for his customers, as well as hunters; and with the further view of putting off as much as possible the transaction of actual business till after luncheon. The Squire is a good judge of a horse, as Maggs well knows; and accordingly, although he cannot resist the usual practice of showing us every brute in the stable before we arrive at "the plums," the enforced inspection is gone through in half the time it would have taken had I been there alone; and after passing in review one or two weedy, long-tailed five-year-olds, an overgrown bay horse with

curbs, and a broken-down steeple chaser, none of which are worth the trouble of having out, we are introduced to a grey of very promising appearance, and contemplate him for some minutes in mute admiration. After you have ascertained that a horse is quiet in the stable, felt his crest, passed your hand down his legs, and picked up his foot, into which you glance as you might look at your watch, and from which you derive about as much information, there is always an awkward pause, during which the customer is at a loss what he ought to say or do next. Now is the time for the dealer; and now Mr. Maggs begins—

"You don't see many shoulders like those, Squire!" (observe, the grey is a good-shaped horse, but his shoulder is the worst point about him)—"they can't help riding pleasant when they're made like him! feel his legs, Mr. Nogo —*famous* legs and feet, and some rare hocks and thighs those, Squire, to help him through the dirt! But I never take notice of make and shape. Give me performances, says I: let me see a horse perform, Mr. Nogo, and I estimate his value by what he does in the field. Now I sent that horse last week with 'Naylus,'

to meet Mr. Wildrake's hounds cub-hunting; and I says to 'Naylus' says I—you keep with the hounds. Well, they ran from Torwood Vale to Wild-Overton—and the Squire knows what that is—and 'Naylus' he never left them. There was only three of them would have the Tiverley Brook—no, I beg pardon, Mr. Nogo, I'm telling you a lie—there was five charged it, but only three got over, 'Naylus' he led the field upon the grey: Mr. Wildrake's huntsman followed him, and wanted his master to buy the horse; but I kept him for the Squire here to see. I think there's few like him in any country, but I *may* be deceived. Will you see him out, Squire?"

And "Naylus" is forthwith summoned to saddle the grey, whilst we pass on to the next box, containing a strong useful brown horse, short in his legs, and with all the appearance of a hunter. Here we have nearly the same "recitative," varied with the different exploits performed by this sober-looking animal in timber-jumping, which appears to be his forte, and in the indulgence of which taste the heroic "Naylus" is related to have ridden him over a complicated double post-and-rail, no later than

the end of last season, which had previously been the terror of all the neighbouring hunts. The brown horse, after an observation of mine, derogatory to his beauty (for he has a large plain head), and which Mr. Maggs passes over in silent contempt, is likewise ordered to be saddled; and in the meantime the dealer courteously entreats us to "step in and take a little refreshment;" without which no transaction in the way of business is ever supposed to be able to proceed.

A comfortable parlour hung round with sporting prints, a slice of pork-pie washed down by a glass of sparkling home-brewed ale, the newest of bread, the freshest of butter, and the raciest of cheese, the whole put to rights by a small glass of undeniable white brandy, prepare one to look upon all sublunary matters —quadrupeds or otherwise—with an indulgent and favourable eye; nor when you have offered your hospitable host a capital cigar, and lit another yourself, do you find that its wreathing fumes at all discompose or decrease this charitable frame of mind. Both the Squire and myself liked the grey horse a good deal better when we saw him out; and as the short-legged "Naylus" trotted, cantered, and galloped him

here and there, he really looked, under his pigmy burden, a fine powerful animal.

"Take him over those rails, 'Naylus,'" said Mr. Maggs in an off-hand manner; and "Naylus," nothing daunted, turned him at a fair-sized timber fence, bounding the soft level meadow in which he was careering. Like most horse-dealers' men, "Naylus" possessed better nerves than hands; but the grey, though held in a grasp like a vice, and urged upon the off-side by a single spur, jumped his fence cleverly, and landed in the field beyond in undeniable form. Back comes "Naylus" over the hedge, and again the horse does what is required of him tractably and well. He "reins up" where we are standing, arches his neck, snorts as though he liked the fun, and I begin to covet him. The Squire lays his leg over him, and gallops round the field, and I like him better and better. Mr. Maggs does not interfere with the favourable impression by any ill-timed remarks, but merely says, "Would you like to feel his action, Mr. Nogo?" and much as I hate an unknown "mount," I too have a taste of the grey. With stirrups the wrong length, and a confused mass of hard, thick reins in my hands, I cannot make him

go unpleasantly; and as I return to where Maggs and his man are standing, and hear the former remark, as if he did not know I was within hearing, "Evidently a workman, 'Naylus.' I should say a gent. from Leicestershire!" I decide upon buying the grey "*coûte qui coûte.*" Elevated by the luncheon, the brandy, and the gallop, I proceed forthwith to mount the brown horse, who is now brought out to sustain his character, and as he is very fresh, and the saddle not yet warm to his back, narrowly escape getting kicked off for my rashness. However, a sharp canter round the field makes us acquainted, and with a lively faith in Mr. Maggs's representations of his jumping powers, and a lurking ambition to show these west-country sportsmen the capabilities of a "gent. from Leicestershire," I turn the brown horse's great fiddle-head, not without trepidation, at the rails. He faces them boldly enough; but at the last moment stops dead-short, and refuses with, as I suspect, a touch of temper. The Squire laughs, and I feel in honour bound to ride him at them again, with an inward anticipation of a fall, and a confirmed disgust for "larking." I give him

another chance: again he stops short, but thinking better of it at the last moment wriggles his fore-hand over, and clears the remaining portion of his frame with a lash of his powerful hind-quarters that sends me clean over his head, to alight on the broad of my back in the splashing water-meadow. I get up rueful, crest-fallen, and irritated, but not the least hurt; whilst the brown horse careers round the field with streaming rein and tail on high, in undisguised exultation at his liberty. There is nothing for it but to buy him as well as the other, to show that I *can* ride him; and after a good deal of desultory conversation, a glass of hot brandy-and-water, much haggling as to price, many compliments from Mr. Maggs, and a curious arrangement entered into, by which a certain sum is specified as the price of a certain article, and a certain percentage on that sum returned *for luck!* I re-enter the Squire's pony-carriage a richer man in the amount of my personalties by one grey and one brown gelding, warranted sound in wind and limb; and a poorer one in my funded property by the sum of one hundred and seventy-five pounds—the price of the

quadrupeds aforesaid; besides one golden sovereign bestowed as a free gift on the one-eyed Cornelius, and requested by that enterprising functionary wholly and entirely *for luck!*

CHAPTER VI.

"Yelled on the view, the opening pack,
Rock, glen, and cavern paid them back;
To many a mingled sound at once
The awakened mountain gave response—
An hundred dogs bayed deep and strong,
Clattered an hundred steeds along."

Lady of the Lake.

My old friend Jack Raffleton, in his hunting days, used to avow that the happiest moment in his life was when he said to his servant, "Call me to-morrow morning at half-past seven; and let the hacks be at the door by nine." Mr. Jorrocks, that most immortal of Nimrods, dearly loved the ride to cover, "the mud on his top-boots, and the smell of the morning h'air." Whilst many an

aspiring sportsman, I verily believe, prizes beyond all other hours of the day, that moment of relief in which he dismounts from his jaded hunter, and hies to his long-wished for "dressing-gown and slippers," and the welcome embrace of his "too easy-chair."

But none of these authorities, however much they may disagree as to the exact period which brings them their greatest amount of felicity in connection with the chase, will venture to deny the charm of that most sociable of meals —a hunting-breakfast: not the uncomfortable repast taken in the dark, with a fork in one hand and a button-hook in the other, by the hurried citizen, who makes "the express" his covert-hack, and who knows not what it is to start for his destination in "The Vale" at a later hour than six a.m.: not the modicum of milk and soda-water which, with half a devilled kidney, forms the sole support of the dissipated youth, whose two thorough-bred hacks must be "told out" between Melton and Keythorpe, because their "wide-awake" master played whist this morning till two, and smoked till four: no, the hunting breakfast I mean is that at which a party of quiet steady-going

sportsmen meet at some picturesque old country-house, with clear heads, rosy faces, and sharpened appetites; men whose affection for hunting vies (and it is saying a good deal) with their regard for their dinners; who know the points of a hound, the line of a fox, and every gap in the fences within twenty miles—such a breakfast, in short, as we sat down to, in the comfortable morning-room of Topthorne Lodge, on the Squire's first hunting day in November.

At the top of the table, half hidden by the urn, the long sunny tresses of Mrs. Montague Forbes drooped over the tea which she knew so well how to sweeten to *my* taste; need I add that, late or early, a place was reserved for *me* at her right hand? Old Mr. Shafto and his wife were staying at the Lodge; and sundry jolly squires and substantial magistrates, rejoicing for the most part in roomy cords and stout black boots, had dropped in to partake of the morning meal. The hounds were to meet on the lawn, and all were full of hilarity and anticipation.

I thought the lady glanced admiringly at my attire as I made my appearance, clad with the strictest attention to costume, in well-

cleaned leathers and deserving "tops;" and even the Squire, although stoutly repudiating dandyism, nodded his approval of my "get-up."

Breakfast progresses—the eggs disappear, and the ham wanes rapidly. The post arrives, and the squires one and all exhibit that rabid eagerness for the newspaper, which in middle-aged country-gentlemen supersedes all other considerations. I am deep in my second cup of tea, and becoming gradually absorbed in a reverie as to the probable merits of my new purchase, the gallant grey, whom I am about to ride with hounds for the first time, when Mrs. Montague's eager exclamation of "a letter from Bagshot! and what do you think?" startles us all into attention.

"You'll never guess, John," she continues; "you'll be so surprised, Mr. Nogo—Bagshot is *going to be married!* and, of all people in the world, to cousin Kate!"

In my ignorance of the fascinating relation who, under the cognomen of "cousin Kate" has subjugated my old friend, I address some unmeaning congratulations to the excited lady, and her somewhat indifferent brother; but the torrent of feminine eloquence, once let loose by

so prolific a subject as a wedding, rushes on unchecked.

"Such a short acquaintance—quite love at first sight, Mr. Nogo—and she seems so much attached to him. They are to be married immediately, and he will bring his bride here at once. What a nice clergyman's wife she will make, and so pretty; but there are few girls like Kate Cotherstone! Shall I give you some more tea, Mr. Nogo? you have upset your last cup all over your"—here Mrs. Montague checked herself, and, fortunately for me, distracted the attention of the company from my manifest confusion.

I never was so completely taken aback—could I believe my ears? "Kate Cotherstone going to be married to Bagshot!" I inwardly ejaculated; "and a cousin of these people, with whom I am on terms of such intimacy—this *is* a go! And coming here almost immediately; but perhaps it may not be *my* Kate Cotherstone," and with this slender consolation I summoned up courage to make further inquiries of my delighted hostess.

"Did you never meet the Cotherstones?" she proceeded; "he is a *great sportsman*' (very like it, thought I); "and she is a most good-

humoured pleasant woman—a cousin of ours. They used to have a charming little villa in Windsor Forest; but they have been abroad lately. I am sure you would like them so much: and as for Kate, she would captivate you altogether," added the widow, with a glance of triumphant malice and conscious success in her mischievous blue eye.

The truth was now completely revealed. A villa at Windsor, and a tour on the continent, left no doubt as to the identity of that dangerous family, and stammering out some incoherent remark, as to "having met them once at Ascot," I took advantage of the Squire's impatience, which was now waxing highly irritable, to make my escape to the lawn, where the hounds were already assembled, and there, in the fresh morning air, endeavoured to regain that composure which this startling and unwelcome intelligence had so completely put to flight.

What to do I knew not. In the first place, notwithstanding all that was past and gone, notwithstanding the fascination exercised over me by Mrs. Montague Forbes, I was still sufficiently sore from the feelings I had so lately entertained for the too charming Kate, not to

relish the idea of meeting her as the bride of another, and that other my old friend Joe Bagshot.

In the next place, this was hardly a connection that would be advantageous to that worthy and respectable divine; and was it not my duty to warn him, before it was too late, of all that I knew concerning this very enterprising family? But then, if they were indeed people to be avoided (and no one had better reason to think so than myself), what was to become of sundry day-dreams gilded by the widow's smile, in which I had lately indulged? If *my* friend was to be dissuaded from marrying Kate on account of her connections, how could *I* consistently enter into an alliance with her mother's first cousin? And if such a proceeding was to be immediately dismissed as out of the question, was I not in honour bound to leave Topthorne Lodge immediately, and at once break off an acquaintance—to call it by no softer name—fraught with such dangers and inconveniences? This, however, would destroy all my arrangements for the autumn, and put me to great personal discomfort—always with me a primary consideration; besides, I doubted my own stoicism if once it should come to

bidding the widow farewell, to say nothing of the difficulty I should find in parrying the Squire's direct questions, and his friends' round-about inquiries, concerning my speedy departure. There was no Jack Raffleton to advise me: I never had enough energy to act entirely for myself in a doubtful case; so adopting my favourite plan of being guided entirely by circumstances—like those doctors, who, leaving Nature to herself, suffer her to kill the patient in her own way—resolved to take no decided course, but to wait philosophically for such events as should duly arrive upon the stream of Time.

It was now necessary to turn my attention to the business of the day, as the Squire was already mounted on his famous horse "Blunderbuss," and, with his hounds around him, two or three of whom I recognized as my tormentors in the kennel, was all anxiety to begin. Whilst he is drawing his own laurels, shrubbery, flower-garden, and washing-green, with a small patch of gorse on the hill, in which the butler sees a fox every morning, and which, as a matter of course, is invariably drawn blank, I may find time to describe the assemblage of sportsmen who now meet my view, and who, I

am given to understand, comprise the *élite* of the Pippingdon Hunt.

To begin with the Squire and his stud. The equestrian was probably as unlike the famous *squire* of Leicestershire notoriety, as "Blunderbuss" was to "Ashton," which, if the description I have had from eye-witnesses of the latter clipper may be relied on, was a difference sufficiently obvious to the most careless observer. But yet Jack Topthorne, as his familiars called him, was a varmint-looking fellow enough: despite his stained coat, with its abominable collar, despite his drab cords, cloth tops, huge hunting cap, uncouth gestures, and ungainly seat, there was a game flash in his eye that looked like "killing:" and I fancy that it was indeed bad scenting weather when the Pippingdon hounds were short of "blood." Though unmistakeably "rough," the Squire looked "ready," and appeared what he was—a thorough practical sportsman. As for "Blunderbuss," a greater brute I never wish to see: with a large, ugly head, lop ears, a sleepy eye, and a white face, he had not one single beauty to make amends for his mealy bay coat—of all colours, to my fancy, the most unsightly; and yet, though a cross-made horse,

he had some good working points about him, but even these were disfigured by the shortest tail I ever saw upon a hunter. This was a crotchet of his master's, for which I was quite prepared by a conversation I chanced to overhear in the Squire's dressing-room, a few weeks previously. A new purchase had lately come home; and, contrary to his usual practice, "master" had bought him from "character," without a personal inspection. Accordingly, no sooner had the animal entered its future quarters, than the groom hurried to "master" with a report of the fresh arrival. The Squire was dressing for dinner, with his door locked; but I plainly heard the following colloquy carried on from either side of the unopened barrier:

Squire: "Well, Ike" (for that functionary united the office of stud-groom to his other avocations), "what sort of a looking horse is he?"

Ike: "Loikely, zur; but uncommon low in flesh he be."

Squire: "Mash him to-morrow, and physic the next day. And, Ike, what sort of a tail has he?"

Ike : " Shortest dock I ever see anywheres—longest hair I ever see *here.*"

" *Squire :* " Very well ; cut his tail off square with the dock—that'll do, Ike."

After this, my surprise was greater to behold Blunderbuss with any vertebral termination at all, than with the short four inches that spasmodically answered every application of his master's spurs.

As was the Squire, so were his field, modified, certainly, in particular instances, but still one and all of the " drab and ditch-water" school—heavy-thonged hunting-whips (a " cut-and-thrust" punisher is an abomination unknown here), short tails, and snaffle-bridles, with a general family resemblance in their jolly complexions, which I could only attribute to their getting their port from the same wine-merchant, and drinking it in equally liberal quantities. They seemed to know one another well, and the country, if possible, better, and were chiefly men of a certain age, on which, as on their old jokes and time-honoured anecdotes, they rather seemed to pride themselves.

Why is it that at every fixture in every country, not excepting the so-called fast

"shires," for one man under thirty you shall find a dozen above forty amongst those who comprise the field? It is as unaccountable as the accompanying fact, that hunting—far from being on the wane, as those who bewail the absence of "young ones coming on" would fain lead us to suppose—is becoming, year by year, a more popular amusement; somewhat, it must be confessed, to the detriment of sport, and greatly to the danger of "forward riders" and "tail hounds," but still a satisfactory reflection to the true lovers of the glorious pursuit. It may be that the young ones now-a-days are rather pinched for money—it may be that the old ones undoubtedly last longer than was the case with the preceding generation, and when the governor and the heir of entail each keeps a stud, it is rather a case of "burning the candle at both ends;" but whatever may be the cause, the Pippingdon Hunt was by no means singular in the proportion it showed of "the prime of life" *versus* the glorious spring-time of delicious twenty-one. Besides these veterans in their scarlets and collars, there was a parson of course; and although unassuming, quiet, and gentlemanlike in his appearance, as is invariably the case

with his profession, he was obviously the fastest of the lot. As I took my hat off to return the bow with which Mr. Rockly honoured my introduction to him, and ran my eye over his lathy figure, graceful seat, and long, low, well-bred chestnut horse, I could not help thinking if there is any truth in appearances, *you* are a first-flight man anywhere and everywhere, be it in a steeple-chasing "scrimmage" from Shankton Holt or the Coplow, be it in a sobbing fifty minutes over the Vale of Belvoir after a thaw, or be it in a long wild foxhunting run, over moor and mountain, "bank and brae," ragged copse and brawling river, from such a rough, straggling, picturesque woodland as we are even now about to draw.

"Yooi in, Bellman and Bonnylass!—stand still, Blunderbuss!" says the Squire in a breath, as he forces the bay horse to take up his position on the side of a bank, and, standing erect in his stirrups, contemplates his hounds, bustling through the still leafy underwood. "Ike," on a five-year-old, has already clapped on to a certain corner, without thinking it necessary to wait to be *told* to do his duty; and there he sits like a statue, looking all ways at once, and eagerly watching for a view: not that he will

holloa if he gets one, as long as there is a hound able to speak to the scent: no, the Squire stands no holloaing, and woe be to the man, servant or gentleman, that gets those square sagacious heads up from their proper occupation.

The hounds are drawing the covert well, and with a certain busy keenness that betokens a scent. The Squire gets into a ride, terminating in the only hand-gate in the country, and fumbles hurriedly for his watch, as old Bustler, snuffing eagerly under his horse's nose, throws up his enormous head, and with a deep prolonged note, like that of some triple-tongued Cerberus, proclaims a find! There is no swell, hard-riding, first whip, to rouse the echoes and scare the wood-nymphs with his loud-cracking thong and unnecessary injunction to "get together," addressed to a pack who are straining every nerve in their efforts to score to the cry. "Ike" is at the further end of the covert, at least half a mile off, and the Squire's horn is left undisturbed in its case.

The hounds have every advantage, for the field are close packed in the lane, like so many herrings in a barrel, and the fastest horse out would scarce get round the wood in time to

head the fox. Now they are running gloriously, throwing a chorus around them that beats the keys of a piano-forte for variety, and what musicians call "expression." We gallop up the lane, parallel with the line, squelching through the puddles, and flinging the dirt in one another's faces, like so many maniacs. See, "Ike" has a view, with his cap in the air; but the well-trained scout is as mute as a mouse.

It is evident our fox is away! and the lessening chorus of the deep-mouthed pack announces that they too must have reached the open. The squires wax frantic: standing in their stirrups and grinning with excitement, they make superhuman efforts to "get forward," and the "breadth of beam" cased in its drab-cord covering, and revealed by many a pair of fluttering crimson tails, shows how right are these ponderous equestrians in holding their nags hard by the head. Mr. Rockly and the chestnut turn short out of the "ruck," and disappear over an awkward stile to the left; but although this is undoubtedly the most direct way to hounds, I can neither pull up in time to follow him, nor have I sufficient confidence in the grey to charge such an ugly

impediment. I gallop on accordingly with the tide. We turn the corner of the wood, dash over a solitary cottage-garden, skirt an orchard, squeeze through a gap in a high bank of hazels beyond, and emerge upon the open moor. What a line! what a country! not a fence in the whole of it! and such galloping ground—a soft elastic sward of tufted grass and heather, that carries a scent totally unknown to less favoured localities, and with room enough to "blow" an Eclipse at the rate we are going. Far ahead of us, rising the opposite hill, stream the lengthening pack, actually *tailing* from pace; but one and all owning the scent. "Ike" is shaking his reins alongside of them; and Parson Rockly, leaning well forward over the wiry chesnut's shoulders, is creeping gradually up to his place. We shall never catch them like this, in fact they are perceptibly gaining upon us even now; but in hunting, every day proves the converse of the old coaching aphorism, "what the big 'uns do by strength, the little 'uns do by cunning" —in the field, where the light weights get by speed, the heavy weights get by sagacity; and just as the hounds disappear over the crest of the hill, the heaviest and rosiest of my com-

panions shoot off at a tangent down a half-obliterated cart-track to the right. Like sheep after the bell-wether, we follow his hoof-marks, and for a considerable period, during which we never slacken our speed, we might, as far as hunting goes, as well be galloping up Rotten Row, for all we see of the chase. Once our pilot pulls up short, takes off his hat, wipes his beaded brow, and listens for an instant. I catch the distant melody on the breeze—down goes the hat with a cram, up he gets in his stirrups, and away again faster than before. We round the shoulder of a hill, and come upon a picturesque and copse-clothed dingle, where we find the hounds at fault, and strenuously endeavouring to recover the scent. "Ike" is sitting quietly on the five-year-old (who looks a good deal blown), waiting with praiseworthy patience till they shall have made their own cast. Parson Rockly has leaped off the chestnut, and is turning his horse's head towards the breeze with an expression of intense enjoyment on his countenance; and the hounds spreading like a fan, are feathering and snuffing for the scent, conscious that they will be undisturbed till they have quite done with it. I look round for the Squire, and behold him

nearly a mile further down the dell, ready to come to his hounds should they require his assistance. How he got there no one can tell; but with a sort of instinctive knowledge of the line of a fox, he had arrived at the very spot where his hounds, on recovering the scent, afterwards crossed the brawling streamlet that divided the ravine. "Ike" was preparing to lift them, when "Rantipole" proclaimed that they required no such assistance; and stooping together to their work, they hunted merrily on, down the banks of the stream, into a more inclosed and habitable-looking country.

And now began the humours of the chase. Hitherto it had been all plain sailing, the fastest galloper and the best-winded horse had the advantage; but the ground upon which we now entered was a deep holding plough, with only an occasional grass field, enclosed by high rotten banks and "pleached" fences; while the lanes were few and far between, and the gates occasionally locked. Of all breaches of confidence, that of locking a gate is the most unpardonable; and, if anything can add to the heinousness of such duplicity, it is the further outrage of turning downwards the upper staple on which it revolves, thereby rendering it im-

possible to obtain a commodious egress by lifting the gate off its hinges. Alas! that such "a dodge" should have reached the unsophisticated West. Under these circumstances ride we *must;* but it takes a considerable time for a string of cautious gentlemen to follow each other, in due and well-timed rotation, over a series of double fences; and, although the hounds are only *hunting*, not *running*, I soon find that my view of the sport becomes again limited to the cords and coat-tails aforesaid. Every now and then I catch a glimpse of the parson "doubling" a high, awkward fence, in masterly style, two or three fields a-head of me; whilst, occasionally, I can see "Ike" shaking his elbows and running in his spurs, as he hustles the young one at some large and uncertain impediment; but there is plenty of occupation nearer home. Our corpulent pilot, warmed by the work and excited by his hitherto unparalleled success, rides boldly at the weakest place in a straggling treacherous sort of hedge, and comes upon his head in an artfully-concealed ditch. After this he discreetly abandons the post of honour, and at each succeeding obstacle there is a ludicrous politeness displayed by the field in their unwillingness to

go first. Then what "come ups" are heard, as a stout gentleman, perched on the summit of a bank, to which he has arrived by a series of cautious advances, is startled by the unwelcome discovery of a second yawning ditch as a trap for the unwary, into the abyss of which he is convinced nothing saves him from being precipitated but the fast hold he has of his horse's head and the unmerciful "job" he inflicts on the docile animal. At last it gets to "leading over;" when luckily, just as the chance of again seeing hounds is becoming more hopeless than ever, a level green lane, running straight as a line for miles, greets our delighted eyes. It is a continuation of Watling-street, or Leeming-lane, or Amen-corner, for aught I know; but never before did I feel so thoroughly grateful to the conquerors of the world as when that old Roman road hove in sight. There is an ugly fence between us and the wished-for highway, which, as "a gent from Leicestershire," I find I am generally expected to negotiate first; and, with a vivid idea of a fall, I harden my heart and go straight at the obstacle. The grey does it so well, and lands so cleverly in the lane, that I feel quite ashamed of not having ridden him more for-

ward; but am consoled by the consciousness of having been surrounded throughout by the *élite* of the Pippingdon men. I see a red coat clattering along on the same friendly road a few hundred yards in front of me, and, as I gradually overhaul the owner, I discover it is the Squire, whose hounds are running through a farm-yard a couple of fields to the right. As I near him he pulls out his watch, and giving old Blunderbuss a "refresher" with both spurs, he exclaims, "An hour and ten minutes, Nogo! he is running for his life." Sure enough the conclusion seems near at hand: the hounds are dashing up one hedge-row and down another, with bristles up and sterns down, as though they were maddening for his blood. All at once up go their heads; and, after a vain effort to recover the line, they stand looking about them in helpless bewilderment. There is a woodland, a field to our right, and the earths are open at Mellerton, two miles further on. The Squire's mind is made up in an instant; thrusting his tired horse through a gap in the fence, which I should never have perceived, with one blast of his horn he gets his hounds round him, and *casts them back*. Probably he thinks his fox

much too hot to seek the woodland, and that had he persevered in making his point for Mellerton we should not have checked. The event proves the Squire was right. He had lain down in the ditch behind us, and the hounds had overrun the scent for a field and a-half. How they take it up in that orchard: ha! yonder he steals, below the fence, towards the gate; they view him as he crawls under its bars, and, tumbling over one-another with the rush of a cataract, they precipitate their two-and-twenty couple of bodies on that gallant little morsel of draggled fur. Who-whoop! who-whoop! resounds in every key—Ike tumbles from his horse amongst his darlings; Topthorne's face beams with delight; Parson Rockly wishes the Master joy of "so gallant a fox and fine a run;" and the rest of the field who, thanks to the Roman road, are mostly forthcoming, burst out into a Babel-like chorus of congratulation and applause. The pilot, heated up to boiling pitch, makes it an hour and twenty-five minutes by his watch; but as he did not come up till some little time after the conclusion, it is probable that although *his* run may have been of that duration, *ours* was not quite so long: the Squire's

description of it in the following words is most likely to be correct—"Not a bad run for the provinces, I think you must allow, Mr. Nogo; eleven miles from point to point, over a fine wild country, with but two trifling checks, and done in an hour and seventeen minutes."

CHAPTER VII.

" Dined, o'er our claret we talk o'er the merit
Of every choice spirit that rode in the run ;
But here the crowd, sir, can talk just as loud, sir,
As those who were forward, enjoying the fun."
Hunting Song.

" Do you pity him ? no : he deserves no pity.
Wilt thou love such a woman ? What ! to make thee an
Instrument, and play false strains upon thee ?—not
To be endured."
As You Like It.

Time—half-past eight o'clock at night; scene—a snug dining-room, a blazing fire, and a horse-shoe table, on the polished surface of which the massive cut-glass decanters, sparkling with old port, that glows like liquid rubies in the firelight, are making their rapid and welcome rounds. The dinner has been excellent, the company agreeable, Mrs. Montague and the ladies have just retired, and we stretch our legs under Jack Topthorne's mahogany with

that delightful sense of repose and comfort which those alone experience whose exercise in the open air has been pushed up to the point at which fatigue commences, but has stopped short of actual "distress." How loose and easy are the thin sable "continuations," to limbs that have been encased since morning in the uncompromising buckskins of the fox-hunter! how grateful the soft, well-cushioned chair, to a frame that has been pounding for some eight or nine hours on the unyielding pigskin, perchance with low cantle, and flaps devoid of stuffing or support! How, as the mind looks back through a halo of enthusiasm on the events of the day, do the difficulties and mischances of the chase wane, in proportion to the waning decanters, whilst its exploits and its triumphs stand out in bold and glorious relief! "Breathes there the man" that cannot at least go, "over the mahogany"—whose nerves are not braced (for the time) to that pitch at which ox-fences are a privilege and a delight, whilst wood and water, in the shape of stiles and brooks, as negotiated in countless succession by his "little bay horse," furnish themes for the pleader's eloquence and the poet's fire?

The after-dinner autobiography of an equestrian is usually a surprising display of self-deception and infatuation. Then how general is the epidemic, attacking equally the old and the young, the bold and the timid; the "customer" who has all day "had the best of it," and who may to-morrow attempt perhaps a third of what he vows to-night, and the sceptical veteran, whom nothing but a continuous line of gates, and an unusually lucky turn, has enabled to scramble up in time to see the finish of to-day! "How well your grey horse carried you, Mr. Nogo!" says my next neighbour, whom I had remarked in the morning as the stoutest man I ever saw riding a cob: "you went like a bird, sir; *I was close to you the whole time!*" "What a beautiful turn the hounds made in the bottom, Topthorne, just before we came to the brook," says another, anxious to draw the attention of the company to the solitary exploit which he has persuaded himself he accomplished—"by-the-bye, how did you get over? I thought it was a wide place, so I took old Golumpus hard by the head, and he did it beautifully in a fly." I remember no brook, but I suppose there must have been something of the kind, as I was in company with the last speaker from the

moment we found, and I do not see why my grey horse should not obtain as much credit from *his* master as falls to the share of the unsuspecting "Golumpus." So, taking courage from the chorus around me, I too begin to talk of the events of the day; and half unconsciously, half led on by the force of example, I fear I YARN most unmercifully as to the feats, past, present, and future, of which I boast myself capable.

The run of the morning, undoubtedly a good one, goes on increasing with every fresh version, till it swells into a performance totally unparalleled in ancient or modern history; and when my health, as a stranger, has been proposed by the most enthusiastic magnate present, the scarlet in whose visage vies with that of his gorgeous attire, the full-dress evening costume of the Pippingdon Hunt, I hesitate not, in my reply, to assure the Squire and his applauding guests that "I never saw such hounds, I never saw such horses, I never saw such a country, and never—no, never—in the whole course of my hunting experience, did I see such a run as that which we have enjoyed together on this eventful day—a run, sir, unequalled in the annals of the chase, and reflecting immortal honour on the toast I am

about to take the liberty of proposing—Health and prosperity to my friend, if he will allow me to call him so, my friend John Topthorne, and the Pippingdon Hunt! With all the honours, gentlemen!" "Capital!" "Bravo!" ("Gammon!" *sotto voce*, from the Squire.) "Topthorne, your health!—no heel-taps! More port! Hip, hip, hurrah!" And the enthusiasm of the Pippingdonians finds vent in a burst of shouting which startles the ladies in the drawing-room, and wakes an alarm in the very kennel, a good quarter of a mile from the house.

Are these the shouting bacchanalians, that glide so stealthily into the adjoining room, where the ladies are assembled over their tea and needlework, seasoned by that mysterious conversation which none of the male sex has ever yet been known to overhear? Is there an instance on record of the earliest arrival from the dining-room ever yet finding the graceful bevy otherwise than sunk in profound silence, and apparently each totally absorbed in her own tea, her own embroidery, or her own thoughts? Are such habits of speechless meditation natural to the sex, or at any time usual with that conversational race? I have been informed that the contrary is the case,

and that the organs of female speech are seldom, if ever, still, but on occasions such as these. What can we conclude? That there are mysteries into which we must not seek to pry; that there are subjects on which we must be content to remain in ignorance; and that the freezing stillness which pervades the cheerful-looking apartment in which tea awaits us is but the reaction consequent upon a burst of simultaneous eloquence, roused by some subject on which the enchanting conclave are solemnly bound to maintain, in the presence of the hostile sex, an unbroken and Masonic silence.

Nevertheless, emboldened by port and encouraged by smiles, we break the formidable line. The seniors, who are conscious of having exceeded their usual moderation with the bottle, assume an additional air of gravity and decorum, to cover the unwonted joviality within, not always successfully, for a bland smile, with occasionally a stifled chuckle, attests the enlivening effects of Topthorne's cellar even on the most pompous of the veterans; whilst some of the younger members wax unusually confidential to their fair neighbours, and embark upon long stories, in which, to judge by the inquiring looks of the puzzled listener, the

point seems continually to elude their mental grasp. Still, one and all appear to enjoy themselves.

Tea succeeds coffee, and music follows the departure of tea. There is shilling whist for those who like it; and the click of billiard-balls from the adjoining room announces that well-lighted apartment to have its share of occupants. A snug flirtation is going on at the piano-forte, between a bachelor squire—at this period of the evening sufficiently malleable—and a not very juvenile young lady, in a most Parisian *toilette*, and with her hair very nicely done. The softening squire leans over her music-book, but what he says is completely drowned to other ears by the swelling *refrain* of the "Marche des Croates," which, as I happen to admire the air, I know she has played at least five times over. Probably, like many other of those *têtes-à-têtes*, which the world calls flirtations, if we could overhear their conversation, we should find it was quite as uninteresting as that of old Mrs. Shafto and her neighbour—a bland, pleasant-looking matron—on the sofa, who are deep in the merits of the former's youngest grandchild, and the defects, culinary and otherwise, of a certain

kitchen-maid, who came to the latter from Castle Bowshot. Every one is occupied, and Mrs. Montague only is alone. I drop into a vacant chair by her side; and, whilst the Croatian March keeps grinding on at the pianoforte, and the old ladies at my elbow ring the changes upon measles, teething, hooping-cough, and board-wages, I spend another evening of delicious enjoyment, that sends me to bed once more, asking myself, as I wind up my watch, "How is this to end? She certainly is a very nice woman; but what is to come of it?"

* * * *

It is proverbially "a long lane that has no turning;" and what with my own indecision how to act, my disinclination to take any step that might alter the extremely pleasant footing on which I found myself at the Lodge, and the rough Squire's hospitable disposition, gratified beyond measure by a long and unceremonious visit, I might have remained as a sort of tolerated hanger-on and family friend of my entertainers till we had all grown old together, without any question being asked as to my intentions, or any hint hazarded as to my departure. But as the stream, which, swollen to

a torrent, bears away before it all opposition, tearing up the very rock from its earth-fast foundation, may yet, when rippling lazily down its summer bed, be turned from its course by the minutest pebble, so doth the human mind, albeit so invincible if inspired by a worthy object and directed to a noble aim, become, when uninfluenced by such higher considerations, the prey of the most trifling circumstance. "What great events from trivial causes spring!" and how little did I think that the accident of my meeting a good-looking, middle-aged lady at an archery-meeting, and afterwards joining her robust brother in the sports of the field, would exercise the influence which it eventually did upon the career and the comfort of the unconscious Tilbury Nogo! Certainly, I was overcome by a concatenation of circumstances: it was not *one* pebble that turned *me*, but a whole heap of them; and, after all, we are willing to persuade ourselves that we are but tools in the hands of Fate—a doctrine which saves the undecided man a large proportion of trouble, and the unsuccessful one a good deal of self-reproach.

Well, I "took no note of time," as I stayed on at the Lodge. Three days in the week I

devoted to the study of the chase with the "Pippingdon," and found myself becoming daily more conversant with woodcraft, more cunning in the art of smuggling over a country without the painful and perilous necessity of jumping large fences; the other three "lawful days," as they are called by our Calvinistic neighbours in the north, were consumed in various sporting pursuits, all connected with the destruction of game and vermin, all studied and effected by the Squire with the ardour of an enthusiast, and the skill of a professor.

Amongst other devices for wearing through the shortening hours of a November day, there is one much in request amongst those who particularly plume themselves on their keenness as sportsmen, or who absolutely require the stimulus of severe exercise to counteract the labour imposed on the digestive organs by their gigantic performances at dinner-time. This amusement, if such it can be called, is playfully termed "shooting wild partridges," whereas it has always appeared to me that the verb "hunting" would convey a far more correct idea of the mode in which these feathered "will-o'-the-wisps" are persecuted. To stagger all day long under a heavy double-

barrelled gun, deafening in report, and wide in bore, so as to insure that extensive range the necessity of which is implied by the very words "November shooting"—to walk at that painful stretch of muscle and sinew, which would hail a jog-trot as an inexpressible relief—to be blown without getting warmth, and tired without achieving success—to enter an extensive stubble, bare as your own lately shaved chin, with the monosyllable "mark" upon your lips, and to leave its bleak and disappointing acres with undischarged weapon, and the same exclamation, now guttural from despair, still gurgling in your throat—to scramble through quickset hedges, and climb up and down precipitous banks, in hopes of getting a shot, and to be forced to console yourself for torn clothes and lacerated person by the suggestion "that they *must* be gone to them turnips," said turnips being two miles off as the crow flies, and in a contrary direction from home—to tie up your disgusted dogs, and resolve manfully upon walking up your game, which the vigilant coveys suffer you to do at a distance of several hundred yards—and finally, shaking from fatigue and sulky from disappointment, to miss the only fair shot you have

had all day—"this may indeed be sport," as was once remarked by an observant philosopher, "but you can hardly call it pleasure." Nevertheless, experience makes even fools wise, and after a few such unsatisfactory days, a few such unsuccessful walks as those I have described, the Squire and I hit upon a method of circumventing these flighty denizens of the stubbles, that saved us both considerably in wind and limb, and that, if it did not fill the bag as rapidly as it should have done, was at least productive of a very liberal consumption of powder and shot.

Our plan was this: Despising, with one antiquated exception, the aid of the pointer-kennel, our first destination was the stable, from whence we selected a certain raking-looking four-year-old, whose instruction as a hunter was about to commence; then, of course, we had to find "Ike," as nothing could ever be done on the demesne of Topthorne without the assistance of that original. A snaffle-bridle was put in the young one's mouth, "Ike" swung himself into the saddle, and we proceeded to business. Choosing a large and thick field of turnips at the back of a certain farm called Wild-wood; and direct-

ing all our operations to that green oasis as an eventual rallying-point, "Ike" was despatched to scour the surrounding stubbles, and as much as possible to drive the birds towards our selected turnips, when such a conversation as this would ensue between the huntsman-gamekeeper and his laconic employer:—

Squire: "Ike, beat that large oat-stubble."

Ike: "How be I to get there, Zur? will'ee have un crawl over the dyke, or be I to deliver un *through* the stile?"

Squire: "Teach him the timber."

And without more ado, the undaunted "Ike" would gather his reins up in a bunch, ply his solitary spur—for on these occasions, under the idea, I presume, that he was only *half* equestrian, he never wore more than one—and despite of slippery ground, unbending ash, bad take-off, and very likely a determined refusal, would arrive at the other side *somehow*, in company with the four-year-old; for even if they fell, they always seemed to get up together. Such was the tuition of the Squire's hunters; and in this manner he combined, as he said, instruction with amusement.

Whilst our domestic Centaur was pursuing his solitary steeple-chase, we would ensconce

ourselves in some sheltering ravine, or under some concealing spinny, and occasionally get a delightful "rocketing" shot at an unwary covey that might fly over our lurking-place on its way to the distant turnips; and when at length the country had been sufficiently scoured, and the partridges driven to that treacherous covert, we used to enter the dripping "swedes," and prepare for action.

Here "Ike" was more than ever in his glory—one steady old pointer being set at liberty on these occasions, our ally conceived that the sport now partook of the nature of hunting, and his excitement was of course proportionate. When the old dog, looking cautiously around him, and lifting one paw after the other, as if the wet contact was most disagreeable to him (which I believe to have been the case), crouched gradually up to his game, and straightened his short stumpy tail, to all the inflexibility of an undoubted point, "Ike's" enthusiasm knew no bounds. Standing up in his stirrups, and waving his cap down to his horse's knees, he would exclaim, "Yooi! over Ponto! have at 'em there, good dog! yooi! rustle 'em up!" and then, suddenly recollecting himself, would take his words up sharp,

with a stammering "I mean, toho! down charge! you brute, and be hanged to you!" After which, as we shot and bagged our game, he relapsed completely into the keeper. In this manner, if we had not a great deal of sport, we were sure of a certain share of amusement; and as the season wore on, and the birds got wilder and wilder, we more and more affected these laughable expeditions.

One blustering afternoon, as the Squire and I were concluding a more than usually successful day's sport in the well-known vicinity of Wilton Cowslips, we descried a stalwart figure hastening towards us, over the adjoining field, which elicited from each of us the simultaneous exclamation of "The Benedict, by all that's wonderful!" and "Bagshot for a hundred!" and sure enough, as he drew near, it was none other than our lately-married friend. The greeting was cordial—nay, boisterous; and congratulations, good wishes, questions and replies were bandied to and fro with heartfelt sincerity.

"You'll come into the vicarage, Squire, and be introduced to Mrs. Bagshot; you must stop at your old quarters, and renew your acquaintance with an old friend, my dear Nogo," said

the hospitable parson; and in another five minutes we were all three walking arm-in-arm up the gravel walk that led to the rustic porch of that well-known dwelling, never before regarded with the painful interest with which to one of the party it was now invested. How my heart beat! how I envied the Squire his careless demeanour and robust unconsciousness! *She* was but Mrs. Bagshot to him—a new neighbour, and nothing more. What was she to me? another minute would show—there is but a satin-wood door between my agitated self and her who was once the hope of my heart, the mistress of my destiny. The door opens—the furniture of the apartment seems whirling round me, the floor and ceiling are heaving and swimming before my eyes, for my brain is reeling as I stand once again in the presence of Kate Cotherstone!

Not the least altered—not a shadow of difference between the Rev. Mrs. Bagshot, and the dangerous Kate of Ascot Heath and Windsor Forest: the black waving hair had lost none of its crispness; the malicious playful glance shot bright as ever from under those jetty eyelashes; the arch smile, curving her Grecian lip, and disclosing the pearly teeth

within, went straight to my heart as in the days of old; the shapely figure had retained all its rounded graces, and the dress was, as usual, perfection. It was Kate herself; and when she came up to me, and put her hand within mine, uniting the cordial greeting due to an old friend, with the most perfect self-possession and *sang froid*, in a manner that none but a woman, and a very clever woman to boot, could have effected, I felt, I am ashamed to say, as much her slave as ever. Of course this was all nonsense: it needed but little reflection to remind me that she was now the bride of my old and valued friend; and even had this not been the case, after all that had taken place, it would have been quite impossible for us ever again to resume our former intimacy. Whilst the Squire was making the agreeable to his new and charming neighbour—for even he was fascinated by the enchantress, and in his uncouth efforts to please reminded me of a bear dancing on its hind legs—I had time to recollect myself, and to press upon Joe, as in duty bound, the usual congratulations which ignorant bachelors offer so warmly to the friend who has gallantly preceded them in the momentous plunge.

In our hurried conversation, I gathered from the delighted bridegroom that his journey to Bath had been the immediate cause of all I now saw before me. A short acquaintance, commencing at a ball, and cemented by one or two tea-drinkings, had convinced him that life without Miss Cotherstone would be a blank indeed—*that* was the piece of furniture, without which the Parsonage was incomplete—*that* was the smile to which it would be so heavenly to return, after clerical duties, or fatiguing field-sports; and, in short, "Joe," for the first time in his life, was completely captivated. As usual, the difference of disposition and character between the two riveted the chain only more firmly. My friend, with his fine manly open heart, his ignorance of guile and deceit—which amounted almost to the simplicity of a child—his trustful nature and unsophisticated candour, was safe to marry a thorough-going woman of the world.

Could I blame him? could I, of all people, be astonished at his infatuation? Ere long he made his proposals to Kate in due form—papa and mamma were abroad; but it took little time to obtain their cordial consent (nor did this surprise me), and the female relative

with whom the fair "fiancée" was staying lost no opportunity of impressing upon her admirer that he was indeed a fortunate man.

Joe's aunt behaved like a trump, as he said himself, like the Queen of Trumps; and she, too, was so fascinated by the little witch, that in addition to the handsome present, standing in her venerable name in the Three per Cent. Consols, with which she complimented her nephew on the morning of his nuptials, she likewise presented his bride with a valuable set of diamonds—none of your paste, but real genuine sparklers, that had remained safely locked up in the custody of the old lady's bankers for the last fifty years.

"We have now been married a fortnight," added Joe, his face beaming with delight, and looking a proper man to win the fancy of any young lady; "and we have not a secret in the world from each other" (good gracious! I thought, I wonder whether she has told him all about me). "If you wish for happiness, my dear Nogo, follow my example; I never knew what it was really to enjoy life till I found Mrs. Bagshot sitting down to breakfast on the opposite side of the table every day, as a matter of course."

The Squire was by this time making a courteous farewell to the cousin who was to him almost a stranger, and it was now my turn to wish the new Mrs. Bagshot good-bye. Again that cordial shake of the hand, again that half-careless, half-meaning glance, that seemed to say, "let by-gones be by-gones"—it was evident that she thought the less said about our previous acquaintance the better; but I had a right to expect some little embarrassment, some slight half-indicated expression of interest in one for whom she had formerly confessed she entertained a decided regard; but no, it was—"Good bye, Mr. Nogo; I trust you will complete your visit here before you leave the country, and not suffer me to frighten you away from your old bachelor quarters," and she smiled in my face as if I had been her grandfather.

"They are an inexplicable race," thought I to myself, as I followed the delighted Squire to the garden-gate; "and this is a chapter in their history that I may puzzle over in vain: the old mythologist was right when he made the Sphinx a lady!"

Reader, have you ever experienced the luxury of being an ill-used man? If you have

not, depend upon it you are ignorant of one of the most engrossing sensations known to the human organization. A man without a grievance is like a kettle half-filled, or rather a kettle merely filled with cold water; but let him only consider himself unfairly treated, let him brood and hatch his grievance till it pervades his system, and straightway he frets, and seethes, and simmers, till at last he boils over in a perfect ecstasy of self-condolence.

As I walked silently alongside the Squire, on our homeward journey, I felt ill-used; I knew not why—I felt dissatisfied with all the characters of the drama in which I had lately taken part, and, above all, with myself. My companion was neither loquacious himself, nor tolerant of loquacity in others, so I had no one to whom I could unbosom myself; and as I kept chafing over Kate's indifference, which piqued me to the core, and at the same time despising my own folly for caring two straws about it—as what could it signify to me?—I gradually worked my feelings up to that state in which a man finds he is ready for any action, no matter how foolish, that takes him from *himself*. In such a mood the sympathy of a female friend is likely to prove dangerous

in the extreme, and to such peril was it my fate unwittingly to expose myself.

As we entered the shrubberies that surrounded Topthorne Lodge, I caught sight of a light-coloured dress fluttering in the breeze before us, which could only belong to the widow, and declining the Squire's invitation to "kennel" with more decision than I could usually find courage for, I pushed on to overtake and walk home with Mrs. Montague, partly in the hope of unburdening my mind by a detail of our afternoon visit, partly with a lurking feeling of triumphant vanity in the thought that here at least I could command an interest in one sympathizing breast—that in those blue eyes I should read no malicious sarcasm, no cold forgetfulness.

It had been dusk an hour ere the dressing-bell summoned us into the house. Backwards and forwards, to and fro, up and down those winding walks and well-kept shrubberies, had we walked and talked, and hinted and hesitated, and lingered, often trenching upon the topic which I believe was nearest both our hearts, and yet the fatal words were unspoken. Grateful to my wounded vanity was the healing salve of Mrs. Montague's implied admira-

tion—triumphant reflection to think that it was in my own power to show Mrs. Bagshot that *she* was not the only person who could forget: and besides such considerations, the widow's smiles, to do her justice, were sufficiently intoxicating in themselves to make a wiser man than me forget prudence, foresight, and everything but the companion by his side. Yet when I went to dress for dinner I was still a free man—the last meshes of the net were unwoven—the spell was incomplete—I had not passed the Rubicon, but by Jove I had been uncommonly close to its brink.

CHAPTER VIII.

" Lo you, here she comes !—this is her
Very guise—and upon my life fast asleep.
Observe her ; stand close."

Macbeth.

" In slumber, I prithee how is it
That souls are oft taking the air,
And paying each other a visit,
While bodies are—Heaven knows where ? "

MOORE.

I HAVE already said, that pleasant as were the days which passed on so smoothly at Topthorne Lodge, the hours of darkness were those in the diurnal twenty-four which were spent least to the satisfaction of my somewhat nervous tem-

perament. Not only did the supernatural horrors of "the Lily of the Lea" haunt my nightly dreams, but the more substantial terrors of midnight assassins, and burglarious entries into peaceful dwelling-houses, as vividly painted in the daily columns of the Morning Journals, kept me awake for many an uncomfortable hour, in a most unenviable state of morbid apprehension.

"The Forest" was a thinly populated district, and proportionably ill supplied with rural police. Poaching on a grand scale had from time immemorial been the characteristic crime of the country; but of late a series of burglaries, not always unaccompanied by violence, had been effected upon lone farm-houses and detached mansions. The larder at Castle Bowshot had been stripped of its savoury contents; Farmer Veal had lost a dozen of currant wine and a side of bacon, ingeniously abstracted by removing a lattice from the cheese-room; whilst old Mrs. Swanshot, on looking under her bed, as had been, during a long and well-spent life, her nightly custom, had found the usual prospect afforded by that dusky locality varied by the lurking figure of a stealthy marauder, certainly a thief—possibly an assas-

sin—coiled up, as the old lady herself said, evidently for no good purpose. With a courage and coolness that proved indisputably the truth of the well-known French military maxim, "*C'est le cœur qui fait le grenadier*," this resolute old woman pulled her unwelcome visitor out by the heels, and as she dragged him from his ambush, greeted him with the following pithy salutation :—

"Now I've got you, I shall not let you go—you're the man I've been looking for for forty years, and here you are at last!"

All these events were decidedly of an uncomfortable tendency; and I'm not sure which of the two catastrophes I regarded with the greatest horror—a visit from the "Spectre-Lily," whom I had now heard so often passing my door, that I believed as firmly in her existence as in my own identity, or a personal collision with some bodily desperado; my only attacking weapon a short brass poker, my only defensive armour a thin cotton shirt.

After such a day of agitation as that which beheld my first interview with Kate in her new capacity, and my long and confidential walk with Mrs. Montague Forbes, it is no wonder that the broken slumbers which visited

my pillow were short and unrefreshing to my excited system. Disturbed and pantomimic dreams, in which confused and changing scenes and figures crowded themselves inexplicably on my brain, were succeeded by an attack of obstinate wakefulness, that no change of position, no amount of tossing and turning, could overcome or modify. It was a mild winter's night, such a night as precedes "a fine hunting morning," and the soft south-west wind sighed mournfully round the house, as it drove the heavy vapour-laden clouds gently athwart the struggling moon-beams; now partially veiling, now totally obscuring her light. It was a night for an adventure of love or war, but no night to be lying wide awake on a restless bed. That cursed clock—how it ticks! I shall ask Topthorne to stop it—I know his sister will, if I only mention it. Ah! I might do worse than come to an understanding at once with her; and that little jilt Kate—how it would pique her! and serve her right. Well, it is no use, but I suppose I must try to get to sleep again.

Such were the dispirited thoughts that half rose in broken murmurs to my lips, when—horror! curdling my blood and freezing my

marrow—came the well-known stealthy step along the passage, that too surely heralded the unearthly approach of "The Lily." A cold perspiration broke out on my forehead, my damp hair stood on end, and my sense of hearing became sharpened to a degree painfully acute. What is this? a low continuous grating sound, as it were outside the house, below my window, and I could almost fancy I caught the tones of a smothered whisper. For a period that to me seems an age, but in all probability is a short five minutes, I sit up in bed, and strain every nerve into the one office of listening. Hark! a slight crash, a low tinkling sound as of broken glass—horror upon horror! the window must surely have been forced; and there are thieves at this moment entering the house! All the ghosts in Acheron are a joke to this ghastly reality: the awful scene I have so often contemplated in fancy has arrived at last; and what am I to do?—lie trembling here whilst the house is robbed and its inmates murdered, to be discovered and have my throat cut after all? or make a dash for the Squire's bed-room, and perhaps in those dark passages come into personal collision with the armed ruffians, who are even now pervading the

ground-floor? Stay here I cannot—no; summoning all my feelings of honour, all my sense of shame to my assistance, I resolve to rush incontinently to the Squire, devote my person to the defence of his hearth, and die like a man in the breach.

Alas that it should be out of my power to meet my fate in the plural of that warlike substantive!—my continuations have been taken down to be brushed, and with naked limbs and unslippered feet I speed along the cold passage on my way to my landlord's dormitory. As I pass an unshuttered window, that looks out to the front of the house, a sort of morbid fascination impels me to stop my frantic career and gaze upon the invading force. To my surprise and confusion I behold two men speeding away over the lawn in the moonlight, apparently in agonies of terror; and I can distinctly hear their wild thrilling cries of "The Ghost!" "The Ghost!" as they disappear over the Ha-ha, which divides the smooth and shaven turf from the wild glades of the undulating park. By this time the house is alarmed—doors bang in all directions—a confusion of voices pervades the night air, in which the shrill organ of female enquiry is

predominant; and the Squire, clad in a rusty dressing-gown, and armed with an iron-headed hunting-whip—in his opinion, for the Squire is a resolute fellow, a weapon efficient enough to disperse an army of housebreakers—comes stalking down the passage, and announces to his terrified domestics that there is no danger: an attempt has been made to enter the house, but the villains have been scared, as he concludes, by a fancied discovery, and we may all go to bed again. With hospitable commiseration for my scanty garments and shivering condition, my anxious host hurries me, with many thanks for my intended assistance, back to my own dormitory, and as he intreats me to seek my couch as quickly as possible, he enters the room at my side: the shutters are unclosed, and the moonbeams streaming in, almost with the light of day: I start back in re-awakened horror, with an exclamation of "The Lily of the Lea" frozen upon my lips, for a white figure stands as if rooted to the floor, in the centre of the apartment, and surveys us with a fixed, stony, and unearthly gaze. Ere the Squire's furious execration of "Nelly! by all that's ——" has thundered in mine ears, the truth flashes upon me in overwhelming con-

fusion; for the white figure staggers backward as we approach; the eyes suddenly kindling into light, roll upon us with dilated horror, and as she sinks into an arm-chair, Mrs. Montague Forbes (for Mrs. Montague Forbes it is) bursts into a paroxysm of weeping, and covers her face with both hands in an irrepressible agony of shame.

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Here was a pretty kettle of fish! as is said to have been observed by the celebrated wizard Michael Scott, when, after a successful day on Tweed-side, he was startled to find the contents of his panniers turned into grotesque imps, and miniature salamanders, by one of those mocking fiends that were ever at the magician's elbow. I had now succeeded in wedging myself into as uncomfortable a fix as ever yet curtailed the freedom of a harmless bachelor! On all sides I was surrounded by difficulties and dilemmas; there was but one way out of it, and that might be described in vulgar Saxon as "out of the frying-pan into the fire." How was I to face the Squire at breakfast? and how was poor Mrs. Montague Forbes to face me? Of course her brother would be furious and vindictive, deaf to reason,

and bent on avenging the insult which he naturally concluded I had offered to his household gods and genealogical tree. Of course he would scout the idea of his sister's being an incurable sleep-walker; and remain incredulous to the fact of her feeling infinitely more horrified than himself at the ambiguous predicament in which this involuntary affliction—for an affliction it is—had placed her. Of course I should be taxed with all the breaches of trust and ungrateful returns for confiding hospitality, that had stained the code of honour, since that extremely improper flirtation which eventually led to the siege of Troy. Of course there was but one appeal, and that must be answered at a short twelve yards, before breakfast, and face to face with what Irish gentlemen call "a peace-maker" at full cock. The way my hand shook, as I contemplated this possibility whilst shaving, was not calculated to inspire me with confidence as to the result of such an "ordeal by battle." Then, even if these desperate measures should not be resorted to, was there not a civil power, that might be brought to bear on my unlucky head? I had heard of many cases of what Mr. Weller calls "conviction for breach" success-

fully adjudicated *against* the defendant, with far less grounds for an eloquent barrister to go upon, than those which might be skilfully adapted to the comprehension of an intelligent jury, as sufficient reason for mulcting my personal property to a large amount, much to the satisfaction of the distressed victim, and the pecuniary benefit of the gentlemen of the long robe. No, I could not bear to be brought before the public in such a manner as this. Some men do not care three straws about notoriety, in fact they rather like it, however questionable may be the means by which it is acquired; but to a shy and sensitive man like myself, the very heading of that unblushing newspaper report, "Forbes *versus* Nogo—breach of promise of marriage," would be enough to drive the patient out of his senses. Such a method of revenge would be nearly as effective as the more probable retaliation I had to dread from a personal encounter with the pugnacious Squire. And then, had I no softening feelings for the agitation and distress which the events of the past night would cause to poor Mrs. Montague? Should I be deaf to her entreaties, and callous to her tears, if it should come to an interview, which was not impos-

sible? Was it not an extremely hard case upon her, that her own character should be sullied, and the peace of her family destroyed, by the pardonable trespass of an unconscious somnambulist? For I saw at a glance how it had all happened; there could be no doubt whatever of the facts of the case. It was evident that the restless widow was an habitual sleep-walker; like Lady Macbeth, it was her custom nightly to patrol the dark staircases and moon-lit passages of Topthorne Lodge; and doubtless the time-honoured tradition of the "Lily of the Lea" had prevented the scared servants from either ascertaining the identity of the apparition, or making their peripatetic mistress aware of her inconvenient habit. This would at once account for the stealthy footsteps and alarming sounds that had broken my rest for so many weeks; and the only extraordinary circumstance was, that the catastrophe had not occurred sooner. On the night in question, an attempt had clearly been made to break into the Lodge by some daring ruffians in the neighbourhood. I had been alarmed by the clumsy manner in which they took out the necessary pane, and the fall of the broken glass on a sort of skirting of pebbles

which surrounded the house. It is probable that the somnambulist had looked out of one of the passage windows, all of which were unshuttered, and that the startled burglars, much to their horror, found themselves all at once face to face with a white spectral-looking figure, in the unearthly moonlight. The tradition of "the Lily" was known far and wide over the district, and the country people one and all firmly believed that Topthorne Lodge "was a haunted house." No wonder the rascals were frightened; and this accounted for the tumultuous flight of which I was a witness from that very window. In the mean time, however, the supposed ghost must have passed my chamber in its nightly course; when I rushed out to alarm the Squire, I naturally left my door a-jar, and the sleep-walker on her return, with the instinct peculiar to that malady, as naturally wandered into the unsecured apartment. Our sudden entrance awoke her roughly, which I have been told is even dangerous for a person in that state; but when the consciousness of her position, and first feeling of her sex, the unfitness of her costume, burst upon her, no wonder the shame-stricken lady was ready to sink into the earth. But

would the Squire believe all this? here was a question to which, often and often as I turned it over in my own mind, I could give no satisfactory answer. Yet was there one way, and that a mode of proceeding to which I was not half disinclined, that would soothe the feelings of his sister, propitiate the unruly Squire, and gratify the vanity, though it might add to the responsibilities, of the agitated individual who was now revolving all these knotty points in his mind, as he proceeded with an irregular and protracted toilette. Why should I not marry the widow? She is handsome (she looked uncommonly well in white, even amidst all the distresses and peculiarities of her position last night), she is sensible, she is good-tempered, and, above all, she is partial to me. Ah, that little egotistical monosyllable; half the attachments that are formed are based upon the supposed good taste and discrimination of the other party, in his or her fancied preference for ourselves. Then this is no crude idea that has now for the first time arisen in my mind: I have been long revolving, though half insensibly, the possibility of such a conclusion to our rapidly progressing acquaintance. I suppose I must marry some day, and

why not now? I wonder what Jack Raffleton will think, and what Segundo will say. And then Kate, now Mrs. Bagshot, what a disappointment to her, to know that I have been meditating this long before she contrived to capture poor Joe! The last reflection was a clincher! but with it came a whole host of misgivings as to the irrevocable step which I was considering; visions of bachelor amusements, Greenwich dinners, midnight cards, "the morning slumber, and the evening wine"—all these to be given up and repudiated at once and for ever—then the long winter evenings, when a *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Montague might have become a very sober, not to say sad enjoyment. The domestic details, the bores of housekeeping, the annoyances of servants—all these visions of the future floated through my brain, and sorely marred my resolution as to the exploit I was meditating; balanced, however, on the other hand, by many and favourable considerations. What dreadful tortures does he impose upon himself, who is incapable of making up his mind! Better be the most wrong-headed blunderer that ever rushed blindfold into a difficulty, than that victim of every

apprehension, that contemptible slave to every circumstance—an undecided man!

Need I say how it was to end? We breakfasted that very morning a united family party. The Squire, whatever may have been *his* intentions had I not declared *mine*, was less gruff than usual, and seemed, to do him justice, really pleased with the arrangement by which we were to become relations. Mrs. Montague, with a shaking hand, a fixed red spot on each cheek, and a glance of quiet triumph in her blue eye, whenever the long-fringed lid was for an instant raised, looked to perfection the pleased yet agitated bride-elect (recollect, it was her second appearance in that character); whilst I felt, as I suppose every other man does who is going to be married, conscious that I ought to be very happy, and that I was very much surprised, half delighted, and half frightened at the magnitude of the undertaking on which I had embarked, and the whole extent of which now dawned upon me for the first time, and firmly resolved that, as there was no retreat, the only thing was, to put a bold face upon the matter, and fight it out like a man.

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I pass over the intermediate time required to arrange lawyer's matters, disagree about "settlements," and—most important item of all—procure the *trousseau* of the bride; nor can I explain upon what principle it is that a lady, as soon as she has made up her generous mind to confer perfect happiness upon one of the baser sex, should instantly discover that the whole of her previous costume is totally unfit for wear, and that it is absolutely indispensable to procure a new "rig-out" from top to toe. Why those garments, the fascinations of which have materially assisted in gaining the victory, should be discarded as unworthy of participating in the triumph, I am at a loss to explain; but that such is the fact, I appeal to Swan and Edgar, Redmayne's, and Harding's —mammas who shop, and papas who pay. Equally inexplicable, unless we refer it to their partiality for "new clothes," is the extraordinary interest shown by one and all of the fair sex, in the approaching nuptials of any individual of their number. No matter whether she is an intimate friend, an avowed enemy, or a total stranger; the fact alone of her having made arrangements to lead one of the opposite party to the altar entitles her at

once to the support and sympathy of the whole sex. Stout elderly women, of between fifty and sixty years of age, may be seen any morning in the vicinity of St. George's, canvassing eagerly for places from whence to view the nuptials of any fashionable couple who may choose to be united in that aristocratic temple of Hymen. They will walk miles on foot, miss their dinners, and shed tears by the pailfull, in the unaccountable interest they seem to take in the ceremony; and yet, were you to give yourself the trouble of enquiring, I will venture to say you will find that not one in ten of these agitated spectators had ever either seen or heard of bride or bridegroom before.

It is not my intention to dwell upon the happy days preceding the final catastrophe about to be presided over by my old ally, Joe Bagshot. The congratulations of friends, more particularly those of the lady, the hints and inuendoes as to my good fortune in securing "such a treasure," the assurances that "I was indeed a lucky fellow," carried to an extent that, as the day drew near for my reaping the advantages of such favourable stars, made me feel painfully conscious of my own unworthiness of the blessings in store for me. The

introduction of my *fiancée* to my own "collaterals," who I was quite sure would find fault with my choice, and the being "trotted out" for inspection and presentation to hers, who I was equally convinced would find fault with me; the visits that had to be paid, and the letters that must be written; the choosing of plate, tea-cups, mahogany bedsteads, coal-scuttles, and domestic servants (in all of which the previous experience of the future Mrs. N. was really invaluable, and probably averted from me the fate of finishing my days in a lunatic asylum); the obtaining a commodious carriage, capable of conveying a large quantity of luggage (my great delight used to be, travelling with nothing but a carpet bag); and the fixing on a suitable residence, of course in the vicinity of my future lady's friends and acquaintances—all these necessary operations and arrangements would fill a folio to describe, as they would destroy the equanimity of a Socrates to undergo. Willingly do I pass from such harassing details to the *tête-à-tête* walks with Mrs. Montague, which it now became a rigorous matter of duty to perform, and which, truth to tell, were pleasant enough

as we sauntered socially along, and made our plans for our future *ménage*.

I had for some time been wondering in my own mind what "Kate"—for by that name I still thought of my old flame—would say to the step which I had taken, and in what manner she would couch her congratulations the first time we should meet; nor were my conjectures destined to remain long unsolved. An early visit from the Parsonage to the Lodge was forestalled by our meeting the clerical couple, in one of our ante-nuptial strolls, half-way between the two houses; and by this chance *rencontre* we avoided much of the stiffness and formality which, even among friends, is inseparable from a morning call of ceremonious congratulation. Mrs. Bagshot was looking her best, as I could not help remarking, although in duty bound to have eyes but for one; and as she took her cousin by both hands, and kissed her with that affectionate *empressement* which ladies are so fond of wasting upon each other, it would have required a close observer to detect the actual dislike which lurked under all this affected cordiality. I am not generally gifted with an eye that penetrates below the surface; but upon this

occasion—perhaps because my senses were sharpened by the severity of the training I was undergoing—I could distinctly perceive that between the two ladies there was, to use a common expression, but "little love lost." How different from the frank warmth of honest Joe's sincere congratulations! But when Kate turned her mischievous eyes upon me, and wished me joy with the frankness of an old friend, and that comic look of arch wickedness which was her principal fascination, and of which, in days gone by, I had too keenly felt the power, I could not help thinking that, with all her inferiority in sense, conduct, and character, to the lady who was about to honour me with her hand, there never was in this world anything half so charming as Kate Cotherstone, now Mrs. Bagshot. "We always considered Mr. Nogo an irreclaimable old bachelor," the little vixen had the unblushing effrontery to say in my very face; "but the fascinations of the west, Mrs. Montague, have been too much for him. When is it *to be*, my dear? I should so like to see the *trousseau*—I hear it is perfectly magnificent." And the two ladies, having got upon that prolific subject, walked towards the Lodge, amidst a

torrent of conversation, turning upon the deceptive art of dress-making, and seasoned with a little amicable sparring, and a few of those retorts with which, at periods of unusual excitement, the gentle beings love to season their discourse. Joe and I followed in their wake, soberly enough. I thought my old friend looked more subdued than usual; but as he had only been married about a month, of course his chains must have sat lightly, and it could not have been his new character that worried him. He did, however, hint to me, in the course of our conversation, that the old brown horse, so much admired in the field as between the shafts, was about to be sold; and that he was thinking of getting his duty done for a few months, and giving Kate *a little gaiety at Bath*. Oh, my prophetic soul! could I not foresee the gloomy future of my own destiny in the clouds which darkened the brow of my once so cheerful friend?

"It won't take long, sir; but, somehow, I wish it was well over," remarked the Muff of the Minories to my unworthy self, on the morning of his eventful contest with the well-known "Brummagem Bouncer," for the particulars of which, couched in the flowery

language of the "fancy," I must refer my readers to the columns of that eloquent periodical, *Bell's Life in London;* and, without for an instant presuming to compare the ceremony illumined by the sacred torch of Hymen with those antagonistic matches which, we learn from the authority of the classics, are presided over by Pollux, I am bound to confess that my waking feeling, on the eventful morning which ushered in my wedding-day, was very much akin to that of my former instructor in the science of self-defence. My head was in a whirl of confusion, consequent upon the number and variety of my necessary arrangements; my eyes were dazzled with the gorgeous and exceedingly unbecoming raiment in which, as is the custom of my country, I was about to face the ordeal; my ears were deafened with the continuous peal which clanged out from the church-steeple of the adjoining village, *pour encourager les autres;* and the only clear impression on my bewildered brain was, a fervent wish that it was this time to-morrow, or next week, or next year! To other and less-interested actors in the scene I must resign the task of describing the different details of the important ceremony—the

merriment of friends; the gravity, not to say sadness, of the principal performers; the business-like air of the clergyman; the concealed commiseration of the beadle; and the sarcastic applause of the clerk. Flowers, I am told, were scattered in our path to and from the simple village-church, ale flowed in hogsheads, and there was bride-cake enough to make all the school-children sick; but of these facts I did not become conscious till long afterwards. The Squire gave away his sister, Bagshot performed the service, the fatal words were spoken; and, as I began to have a dim consciousness that Mrs. Montague Forbes had now become Mrs. Nogo, part and parcel of myself, I felt a horrid uncertainty as to the identity of the former owner of that patronymic—a ghastly doubt as to whether this was indeed still the same individual whom, for more years than it is necessary to specify, I had considered as my best and most indulgent friend.

CHAPTER IX.

Davy. Marry sir, thus—those precepts cannot be served: and again sir, shall we sow the headland with wheat?

Shallow. With red wheat, Davy.

Davy. Now, sir, a new link to the bucket must needs be had.—And, sir, do you mean to stop any of William's wages about the sack he lost the other day at Hinkley fair?

King Henry IV.

GLOWING hath ever been the poet's description of the simplicity of rustic life; and much hath plain English been swollen into stanzas, and distorted into rhyme, for the purpose of enlarging on the fable of the "town and country mouse." But paradoxical as it may appear, I am inclined to believe that those, who in theory are most enthusiastic in their admiration of a

country life, are the very men, Londoners by destiny, and cockneys in grain, for whom the charms of such a vegetable existence are chiefly enhanced by the impossibility of their following out their arcadian ideal, and with whom, as with the rest of us, in this discontented world, desire springs most intensely from separation. That poetical wag and polished satirist, who delighted the rank and fashion of ancient Rome with his life-like descriptions, as with his dancing numbers, and bequeathed the name of Horace to our later age, as a type of all that is amusing and agreeable to the man, albeit somewhat unpopular with the school-boy, modestly expresses the summit of his dearest wishes to be a small farm, a few rods of wood, and a clear and rippling stream; while the very vividness with which, in a few lines, he places before us the sunny slope, the shady grove, and the refreshing waters, proves that in his yearning after the clear atmosphere, and the balmy breeze of the country, he was at heart essentially a cockney. But had the bard been destined to sit down for life under his arbutus trees, removed from the charms of his Augustan *coterie*, as from "the smoke, the riches, and the noise of Rome;" had he been

compelled to earn an appetite for his garlic pottage, by the daily superintendence of his Sabine clod-poles, cleaving his Sabine clods; had his conversation with his neighbours been limited to the price of wheat, and his computation of time been reckoned by the yearly epochs of hay-making and harvest, we may fairly conclude that the sociable minstrel would have found such an existence a very poor exchange for the life, the fun, and the luxurious repasts of the capital, and would have left us many a terse and classical interpretation of that too well-known substantive which the French call *ennui*, and the English *bore*.

Well, I too have pined for a country-life; I have got up on a fine morning, in London, when the sun, for want of any thing better, was wasting his gilding on the chimney-pots; and I have longed for the smiling pastures, the breezy uplands, and the hill and dale of the open country—have thought that the summit of earthly happiness was to walk round the farm before breakfast, the *acmè* of human comfort to make your own butter and eat your own mutton; but it is a dangerous experiment for any man, whose youth has been passed in a metropolitan sphere of life, using the expression

in its widest sense, and thereby including all the pleasures and amusements of Windsor, Ascot, Epsom, Melton—aye, even the Highlands of Scotland, which are enjoyed by London people, in a London manner—I say it is a dangerous experiment for a man educated in such a school to sit down for life in some quiet nook of a rural parish, and to suppose that because he has sometimes been bored with London, he is for that reason fitted to live entirely in the country. I have always fancied that to fill the situation effectively a man should have been bred a farmer; and although we see many noblemen and gentlemen, when they have done with the more stirring avocations of the court, the camp, and the senate, assuming the yellow gaiters and out-of-door habits of agricultural prosperity, I have never been given to understand that their cultivation of the soil is based upon a method either so convenient or so profitable as that of the honest yeoman, "whose farm on his honour's estate is the same that his grandfather tilled;" or that, much as they may study its nature, and argue upon its minutiæ, they ever attain that success in the profession of our first parents, which they have achieved in the busier avocations of

their early life. For my own part, sparingly as fortune has ever smiled upon my endeavours, I think my farming has been the worst speculation of all; nor can I be convinced that I was in my right senses when, having determined to settle permanently in the west, and as near as possible to Topthorne Lodge, I bought the small estate and commodious farm-house of Wild-wood, formerly the property of my friend Segundo, for which I paid fully one-third more than its marketable value, and on three hundred acres of which, I determined, at my own risk, to put in practice my own ideas as to the tillage of the soil.

Behold me then settled in life; married to the handsome widow, and, truth to say, somewhat proud of the feat; inhabiting a comfortable though small and detached house, furnished by my wife's tact in a luxurious manner, and what people call comparatively at small expense, qualified as a magistrate, respected as a land-owner, and, in short, learning to be a country gentleman. And now began a series of troubles and annoyances, which innocuously as they may fall on the heads of some callous individuals, are to an indolent and sensitive man like barbed darts and venomed arrows.

Morning, noon, and night, there was no leisure and no repose. Time hung heavily on my hands; yet had I never an hour to myself. An out-of-door life was what I wanted to accomplish by my new pursuit; yet every one connected with the farm would come and talk to me in my own sitting room, "larding" the neat carpet with mud of every different description of fertility. If I wished to shoot, my beat had to be regulated, not by the wildness of the birds and the lay of the ground, but by the necessity of diverging into this "close" to see if the fence had been mended, or splashing through that meadow to ascertain if the drains were running properly. Domestic details were bad enough; but the carelessness of the butcher, or the stupidity of the grocer, were as nothing compared to that which was done which should have been left undone, and never commenced which should have been completed, at that infernal farm.

Probably a diary of one of the many weary days at Wild-wood will give my sympathising reader a better idea of rural felicity than all the lamentations which I could pour forth upon this plaintive theme. Imagine, in the first place, a pretty little house in a most pic-

turesque situation, the building itself combining the attractiveness of a cottage with the conveniences of a mansion; imagine it fancifully furnished and thoroughly warmed, with good stabling and out-houses attached, and plenty of room for servants—that *sine quâ non* without which peace is not. Imagine a surrounding country, beautiful in all the undulating richness peculiar to the west; a manor fairly stocked with game, and a neighbourhood in which good dinners were plentiful as blackberries, and old port common as ditch-water; and conceive all these agreeable sundries being spoiled and alloyed by the proximity of that confounded three-hundred acres of arable land.

But to return to the diary. Seven o'clock brings a summons to arise; and although an early hour for a bride-groom, it must be attended to, because "Jacob," my bailiff and factotum, has appointed to see me "fust thing i' th' marning," about giving the men their orders with regard to cutting an unnecessary drain to an unheard-of depth. I yawn my way to my dressing-room, where there is no fire, for the new housemaid is not an early riser, and "master" is too green at the trade

to have yet become much of a disciplinarian. Luke-warm water produces a rugged shave, and enduing myself in dread-nought attire, I accompany "Jacob" through a drizzling rain to the "thirty acres," there to find two of the men cannot come because to-day happens to be "Weatherley revel," and for all the good I have done by my exertions I might just as well have remained in bed. A second toilette fits me for breakfast, and I look forward to a comfortable and domestic meal, the novelty of having my tea made by Mrs. Nogo (I cannot quite bring myself to call her "Nelly") not having yet worn off. The widow, however, has had experience in the ways of the world, and one of the lessons which it has inculcated is never to hurry herself—above all, in such an important ceremony as the toilette; so I am reduced to the painful alternative of beginning breakfast without her (in which case I shall appear churlish, and have my tea badly made), or of sitting down to the-day-before-yesterday's paper, already conned through, and last night fallen asleep over, to wait in patience for the arrival of my better half. Down she comes at length, very nicely dressed, but not feeling "very well," which I have already learned

means being slightly out of sorts, and is a bad beginning for the day.

"My dear, I wish you would speak to James about that tea-pot; it is disgracefully cleaned, and nothing spoils servants so much as passing over these things."

James is the new footman, a six-foot magnifico, and I should just as soon think of reprimanding Julius Cæsar; but I dare say Mrs. N. will do it for me, and twice as effectually.

"You'll drive me to the Lodge, Til., after luncheon," adds my wife, in an accent I never quite like to disobey; and although I had meant to get a quiet afternoon's shooting, I express a ready compliance, and breakfast progresses comfortably; I am just going to have a second cup of tea, when enter stately James, as though he were announcing a Duke, to say that "Farmer Veal" is waiting to see me in the study, as servants always persist in calling the apartment where "master" keeps his guns, &c.; and as the gentle Mrs. N. signifies "I had better speak to him at once and have done with it," I forego my other cup and hasten to an interview with the yeoman, having for its object the purchase of a certain quantity of what are termed "store-pigs." It is by this

time getting towards noon, the hour at which I was once accustomed to enjoy the double luxury of a book and a cigar; but these "littering habits," as Mrs. N. calls them, I have now entirely abandoned for ever, and contenting myself with the unsatisfactory substitute of a tooth-pick, I accompany "Jacob" to the yard to inspect a new arrival in the shape of a famous short-horned bull, whom I have purchased at the price of a hunter, but whom I dare not approach with any of the familiarity with which I should handle the latter animal. "Jacob" thinks I paid too much money for him, in which opinion I cordially coincide, and the morning passes off in a series of fault-findings with inefficient bricklayers and dull labourers, who only seem to comprehend how much more profitable it is to work by "the day" than by "the foot." Luncheon, in which I detect more of yesterday's dinner than I could easily believe to have survived, is interrupted by the collector of rates and taxes (imposts which I fancy my predecessor Segundo never dreamed of paying), and that functionary seems disposed to visit upon the successor all the deficiencies incurred by the previous owner.

"Have you ordered the pony-carriage, Til.?" says Mrs. N.; and my multifarious occupations having prevented the morning visit to the stable, which I had always looked forward to as so principal a charm of a regular life, I am forced to confess that I have neglected to do so, and to swallow as best I may the involuntary exclamation of "Dear, how stupid!" which escapes from the lips that have so lately vowed "to love, honour, and obey." The filth of the straw-yard has made it necessary to adjourn once more to the dressing-room, before I am fit to enter a carriage of any description; and this time, with a pardonable anxiety to appear to advantage in the eyes of my late wedded wife, I get myself up with more than common care and smartness. Alas! the new Southdowns, placed in a secluded meadow at the back of the house, have one and all broke from their moorings in a state of timid insubordination ludicrous to contemplate; and I cannot resist lending my assistance to "Jacob" and his myrmidons, in reclaiming the woolly truants to their original bounds. Varnished boots harmonize but ill with a clay soil, and I am greeted "as a very untidy figure," when I at length take my seat

in the pony-chaise *en route* for Topthorne Lodge. The Squire is not at home, having gone to shoot the outlying coverts, at Moorbank, whither had it not been for my farming avocations I was to have accompanied him, and where he is now peppering away in all the enjoyment of a capital day's sport; so there is nothing for it but to drive quietly home again. The pony suddenly falls lame, and at the same time a tempest of wind and rain, which has been brewing in the horizon during the whole afternoon, bursts upon us in pitiless fury, and as there is not a building for miles of our road, we are exposed to the whole violence of the storm. The umbrellas have been forgotten of course, and we are drenched to the skin; Mrs. N's. *recherché* toilette, part of the lately acquired *trousseau,* being completely spoiled, and my sweet bride's silence, not to say reserve, becoming more profound with each succeeding gust. We reach Wild-wood at last, and here a dry suit of clothes, albeit indued in a smoky dressing-room, restore me to something approaching towards comfort, and I refrain from disturbing Mrs. N., in hopes that by the time dinner is announced she may have recovered her former gaiety and cheerfulness: that necessary

meal is kept waiting, and the mutton irretrievably spoiled, by an enforced interview with one of my new tenants, who taking the opportunity of his return from Weatherley revel in a state of tipsy jocularity for an ill-timed interview with his landlord on matters of business, is good enough to favour me with his company for three-quarters of an hour, during which he discusses the weather, the ministry, Mrs. Nogo's health; in short, every thing in the world except the point at issue, and eventually takes his departure, having effected no decided result except the ruin of my over-roasted joint. A quiet evening, a snooze over the "*Quarterly*," undisturbed by any music (for Mrs. Nogo confesses she has become "very idle about playing"), and a cup of tea at nine o'clock would console me for the annoyances of the day, but that my rest is interrupted and my nerves shaken by the keeper bringing in a poacher whom he has taken at this untimely hour, and whom he seems to expect, in the double capacity of magistrate and proprietor, I shall transport on the spot. The evening is concluded by a perusal of the county paper, in which the account of a horrid burglary accompanied with violence, and perpetrated at

a lone farm-house not twelve miles from where we live, sends me to bed not at all satisfied that the life of a country gentleman, residing on his own property and farming his own acres, is half such a course of unruffled prosperity as in my London career I had ever been taught to consider it.

Thus the days rolled on; and as I soon got more careless about the farm, and discovered that Mrs. Nogo, with all her charms, was subject to sundry weaknesses of her sex, such as "nervous attacks," "palpitations of the heart" when anything went wrong, and "lowness of spirits" when cheered by no other society than my own, I began to cast about for some amusing pursuit, which, while it took me abroad for the purpose of air and exercise, should at the same time furnish me with a little of that wholesome excitement to which I had all my life been accustomed. The Squire's hounds were generally so wide of my present residence, that one day a week with my brother-in-law was the most I could conveniently accomplish; and shooting, besides being comparatively a tame amusement, cannot last over the month of February. Suddenly the idea struck me, why should I not keep a pack of

harriers? Like all new comers, I was as yet popular with the farmers; I had two or three moderately good horses, and one very clever pony. "Bill," the boy who did all the work of the stable, was quick and handy, and rode well: he might whip-in to me; I would hunt the hounds and blow the horn in my proper person. And already, in my mind's eye, the appointments of the Wild-wood hunt, or Mr. Nogo's harriers, took their honoured place at the bottom of the hunting column in *Bell's Life*. I hinted my intention to the Squire; and, unlike most masters of fox-hounds, he largely encouraged the idea, and liberally presented me with a most unsightly draft from his own kennel. Far and near, the country was scoured for anything in the shape of a hound that was attainable for love or money: and blue-mottled beagles, lap-eared harriers, with now and then a great rough-coated southern "bellower," made their successive appearances in the make-shift kennel at Wild-wood farm. A green coat was built by the tailor at Weatherley, a couple of useful forty-pound nags purchased from the neighbouring farmers, a horn which I could not blow ordered from London; and in a space of time so short that

it astonished even my impatient self, I found the day had arrived on which I was to take the field for the first time in my new capacity of master and huntsman.

Much do I fear that the once-appreciated sport so much lauded in the ancient ditty which affirms "that nothing can compare with the hunting of the hare" is now falling, if not into disuse, at least into a contempt which it does not deserve. In the present days of rapidity both in thought and movement, any amusement which does not partake of the boiling excitement so necessary to our modern youth, is at once condemned as "slow;" an adjective that seems to comprise everything that is most despicable in the opinion of those who use it. To get upon a high-couraged, well-bred, and perfectly broken hunter; to ride him for twenty minutes at the rate of twenty miles an hour, after a pack of hounds that during the last half of that time have over-run the scent; to jump the stile that Rasper fell over, and face the brook that Brag refused; to take gates in his stride and doubles in his swing—such seem to be the ideas connected with hunting, in the mind of one of our rising generation of sportsmen. Hear him

describe a run after dinner—that genial period when the true sentiments of the man rise to the surface as brightly as the *Château Margeaux* bubbles to the goblet's brim; and is not this very much the fashion in which he relates a day's sport, wherein the hounds seem to be the very last subject under consideration? "Directly I heard the foot-people holloa him away from the opposite side, I went down and jumped that 'bottom' where Smasher got his horse cast last season, and by that means got a capital start away from the people, and a-head of the leading hounds. We had some queer fences, I can tell you; but luckily for me, I was riding old Flash-in-the-pan, 'and at the pace we were going' he thought nothing of them. Bumptious was a little a-head of me, but his horse refused the brook; and as I jumped it in my stride, I overhauled him." Here you put in a question as to what sort of head the hounds carried, what terms they were on with their fox, the assistance, if any, which they received from their huntsman; and for a moment you rate the fast one back to the line, but it is only for a moment. "Oh, the hounds!" he replies, as if he should not otherwise have mentioned them—"they ran like

fury; it was all grass, and I believe up wind. I know the pace was so good I was blown when we got to the double-post and rails; but I broke the further one, and got over without a fall." And filling a large glass of claret, he gets back to his own deeds of daring and the incomparable prowess of Flash-in-the-pan. But exciting as all this is, and good fun as unquestionably it must be, we can scarcely call these steeple-chases after hounds by the name of hunting, or the vain-glorious promoters thereof by the title of sportsmen. Do they ever consider that if no one took more pains than themselves to master the arcana of that pursuit, to which, after all, they devote a large portion of their time; if master, huntsman, whips, hounds, &c., were "all for a gallop" and nothing else; if the head of the establishment were not cautious, and his myrmidons what our lively friend terms "slow," what would become of that reliance on each other, that equality in pace, and union in quickness, which enables a pack of hounds to show him such a breather as "winds up" his favourite hunter—thorough-bred one though he be—in less than a quarter of an hour? This brilliant display, like some gorgeous pantomime, has been pre-

pared and "got up" with a degree of pains and trouble which only those who are "behind the scenes" can appreciate or calculate: and many an endless woodland, many a cold hunting "journey" can bear witness to the perseverance and discipline which eventually attain such popular results as "twenty-five minutes without a check over the grass, six miles from point to point, and pulled him down in the middle of a sixty-acre field, a quarter of a mile from the main earths at Cold Harbour, which were open." Let us then not turn up our noses when the hounds put down theirs; let us not despise slow-hunting; and, above all, the slow-hunting which is so characteristic of a pack of harriers. I have heard it said by men who have distinguished themselves in both pursuits, that the science and ingenuity required to kill "a good hare," are even greater than those which are necessary to give an account of a "bad fox;" and there is many a weather-beaten old dodger, in low-crowned hat and mahogany tops, mounted on some venerable "bo-kicker" with a snaffle bridle, who brings a degree of thoughtfulness and quick apprehension to bear on his long-eared, blue-mottled favourites, that would do

honour to the fastest huntsman that ever rode over the most flying country of the much-admired "shires."

Well, notwithstanding Mrs. Nogo's contempt for the whole performance, I got my hounds together, learned their names, drafted, fed, and encouraged them till they knew me as intimately and confided in me as entirely as the most sagacious retriever in Norfolk knows and confides in the tyrant in velveteen, whose heel he has followed since his puppyhood, and from whom no amount of seduction can tempt the faithful and much enduring animal. It really was a pleasure on a fine scenting morning to ride one of my quiet steady-going horses to the kennel door, and witness the rush of my favourites as they came pouring out to meet me, jumping over each other's backs in their eagerness to share their master's approbation, and ever and anon throwing their deep mellow tongues; while they shook back their long, pendant ears, as if to tell me how ready and willing they were for our mutual labour and amusement. It is needless to describe the difficulties I had to encounter, or the ignorance I was obliged to conceal, in my first attempts at hunting the wiliest animal of the chase; for

in shrewd cunning and baffling subterfuge, I conceive a hare to be infinitely more deceptive than a fox. In time my hounds became steady, and I began to *learn;* and ere long a good scenting day and some opportune assistance from a farmer enabled me to decide upon the great superiority conceded at the dinner-table to a hare that has been *hunted* to death, over her sister peppered with No. 6 and afterwards mangled by a retriever at a battue. But satisfactory as was my success on this never-to-be-forgotten occasion, I had no one with whom to discuss my perplexities or to enjoy my triumphs.

Mrs. Nogo took, as she said *now*, "little interest in field-sports;" the few farmers over whose land I rode were not people I could ask to dinner, and the Squire was so occupied with county business and the management of his own fox-hounds, that he had seldom leisure to pay me a visit, or to look at my harriers. Joe Bagshot, who was a priceless companion in the field or at the dinner-table, had sold the old brown horse, and was becoming, since his marriage, an *altered man;* whilst the country gentlemen and squirearchy lived mostly so wide of Wild-wood, as to make it impossible

to keep up anything like constant intercourse. In this dearth of society, it occurred to me that I should be doing myself a favour, as well as conferring a kindness upon my *ci-devant* medical adviser, by inviting little Dr. Dott, that enthusiast in sporting and surgery, that Nimrod of the Pharmacopœia, to come down and stay with me a week or ten days, and enjoy in practice those amusements on which in theory he so loved to expatiate. My horses were easy and temperate: even if *they* should be too much for the little doctor, a child might ride the pony. Yes, I would ask him down, mount him, take him over to the kennels at Topthorne, and send him home with anecdotes of the wild sports of the west, that should last him his life-time, and make his wife and children stare with astonishment to hear the heroic deeds of the head of the family.

Leave was obtained from Mrs. Nogo, though not without some slight demur, until it occurred to her that to have a "medical man in the house" would be such a comfort in her state of health; a note was despatched to London containing a pressing invitation, and full particulars as to the route by which my guest was to reach the farm. His reply to my letter,

forwarded by return of post, so eagerly accepted my offer, that I really looked forward with the greatest pleasure to the arrival of my Esculapius; nor from my previous knowledge of the limited extent of his practice did my conscience smite me as to the harm his absence from London might inflict upon his interests. I sent a dog-cart to meet him at the station—for even in that remote district there was a railway, and consequently a station; and as Mrs. Nogo and myself sat over the drawing-room fire, and deferred ordering tea until the arrival of our guest, we amused ourselves with speculating on his surprise and delight at a mode of life so entirely differing from his usual habits; whilst we listened, not I am afraid without a slight degree of self-satisfaction, to the wintry wind that howled round the house, and drove the pattering rain against the windows, whilst we charitably hoped that "the waters might not be out" at the ford through which our expected guest must pass ere he could arrive at Wild-wood farm.

CHAPTER X.

"Oh! how they bustled round him,
How merrily they found him;
And how stealthily they wound him,
Through each dingle and each dell!
Oh! how they sped together
O'er the moor among the heather,
Like birds of the same feather!
And their music like a bell."

Original Hunting Song.

Fool.—"Prythee, nuncle, be contented; this is
A naughty night to swim in."

King Lear.

A RING at the door-bell—a shuffling of feet—a banging of doors—and that peculiar vibration which, even in the most solidly-built house, heralds "an arrival"—announced that the Doctor had successfully braved the dangers

and difficulties of open commons, treacherous fords, muddy lanes, and dubious cross-roads, in defiance of the darkness and the gale. As I rushed into the entrance-hall to greet my guest, he was in the act of "peeling": nor could "Cheops" himself, though swathed in the multiplied paraphernalia of a "mummy," have rejoiced in a greater number of defensive garments than those which enveloped the careful wayfarer. Off they came: first an oil-skin travelling head-dress, attached, like the mailed hood of some warlike Templar, to a set of waterproof robes that might defy a deluge —then a red silk handkerchief, bound skilfully round the ear-flaps of a fur cap—then a gaudy-patterned shawl, which had preserved nose and mouth from contact with the elements—then a series of great coats, commencing with a sporting wrap-rascal, and concluding with the well-known black "Taglioni," which was considered a sufficiently professional costume for the metropolis—lower down, drab mud-boots, and India-rubber goloshes, challenged even the casualties of an upset and a pedestrian pilgrimage through the mud—till, skin after skin being cast off and laid aside, we came to the Doctor at last.

"Glad to see you looking so well, Mr. Nogo," was his cheerful reply to my greetings. "Ah! nothing like country-air and exercise. This, sir, is indeed a delightful situation (it had been pitch dark for the last ten miles of the Doctor's journey)—so wild, so free, so completely the country. Charmed to be presented to Mrs. Nogo. No more reckless escapadoes now—an altered man, sir, an altered man. The wildest of us tame at last, I say to Mrs. Dott: but the spirit remains the same."

And, thus prattling on, the Doctor was ushered into the drawing-room, and set down to the tea-table, where I was agreeably surprised to find Mrs. Nogo was inclined to be extremely affable and condescending. Our good-humoured little guest was enchanted with all he saw and all he heard. The country cream was so rich—the country butter was so good—it was so pleasant to hear the wild wind howling round the house, uninterrupted by the muffin-man's bell, or the roll of the Kennington omnibus; but never shall I forget his delight when, on the retirement of Mrs. Nogo, I announced to him the arrangements I had made for the following day's sport, and the

exciting intelligence that I had a "capital mount for him with my harriers."

"A thing I've pined for, for years, Mr. Nogo," exclaimed this theoretical Nimrod. "Fond as I am, sir, of shooting, and other field sports, I despise them all as compared with the chase. Destiny, sir, has made me a doctor; but Nature, Mr. Nogo—'pon my word, I sometimes think, Nature intended me for an Osbaldiston!"

And with this comfortable assurance my enthusiastic guest, refusing all offers of wine-and-water on the plea that he wished his nerves to be in tip-top order for the morrow, lit his bed-candle and retired to his chamber in that enviable state of anticipatory excitement which few of us are fortunate enough to experience after our school-boy days have been numbered with the past.

Notwithstanding our ill-natured remarks upon it, what a climate after all is our own! John Bull thinks it his right to abuse incessantly two things which he considers his peculiar property; and those are, his Ministry and his weather; yet if we can get him to reason—no easy task—he must confess, that in no other country are public affairs managed with

so much regard to public good, and under no other skies does animal life, whether of man or beast, thrive so well, or attain so high a degree of perfection. "Variety is charming," and that charm no one can deny to the different kinds of weather which successively constitute an English summer's day; yet, with all its fickleness, all its changes, I doubt whether there is any other climate under the sun in which a person may be so many *hours* out-of-doors and taking exercise as in our own. Either it is too hot during one part of the year, or too cold during another, or there is a stillness which suffocates you, varied by a land-breeze that produces, you know not why, ague, malaria, disease, and death; whilst in England that very mutability which disappoints you of your excursion in the morning, produces in the afternoon an atmosphere such as you have figured to yourself surrounded our first parents in Paradise; whilst a night of wind, rain, and tempest, is succeeded by a soft, sunny, mild, winter's morning, breathing fragrance from saturated sward and dripping hawthorn, and reminding you, if a sportsman, of bounding steed and echoing hound, and the many fine runs you have seen and enjoyed, during that

golden period of the foxhunter's calendar, the sport-producing month of February.

Such a morning greeted the Doctor and myself as we started—after a voluminous breakfast, to which I thought my guest did but scant justice—on our way to the meet. My hounds had gone on early. As we were to hunt in a wild moorland district several miles from the farm, and with a praiseworthy regard for his unaccustomed frame, and a due consideration of the "loss of leather" sustained by the sportsman who can only obtain "an occasional day," I thought it best to take the Doctor "on wheels" to the place of meeting, and thereby save him as large a portion as possible of that equestrian exercise which, when freely indulged in without proper preparation, makes "the rack of a too easy chair" anything but an ironical metaphor, or a poetic exaggeration. As we drove along through the fresh morning air, my companion was loud in his anticipations of sport, and his implied compliments to his own prowess in the field, though I thought I detected a shade of nervousness in the rapidity of his utterance and the many questions he put to me as to the temperate deportment of his "mount." The

Doctor's costume, too, though doubtless well adapted to encounter the "moving accidents of flood and field," was hardly what we should call workmanlike in its general character and the way in which it was put on: drab cord trowsers, thrust into the recesses of large jack-boots, the latter appendages adorned with huge brass spurs, harmonized but ill with a black frock-coat and moleskin waistcoat; nor did the addition of a velvet hunting-cap, purchased for the occasion, at once confer upon the wearer that sporting air of distinction which he evidently desired to assume. However, the Doctor's dress was his own affair; it was my business, if possible, to show him a run: and when we drove up to our appointed "rendezvous"—a small clump of firs on a wide open common—and found hounds, horses, one or two well-mounted gentlemen, a country horse-breaker, and several farmers, grouped about in picturesque confusion, I began to feel that my reputation, too, was at stake as a master of hounds, and to experience a sort of nervous anxiety to show them a fine day's sport! The first thing, however, was to give the Doctor a fair start; and in order to do so, it was necessary to get him well established in

the saddle. With this view my grey horse Blueskin, the soberest and most tractable animal in my stable, was sidled up to the step of the dog-cart, in order that the Doctor might get upon him, in true Melton fashion, without soiling the brilliancy of his jack-boots—a manœuvre which the grey resented by putting his ears back, tucking in his tail, and looking very much inclined to kick. Why is it that whenever you have been boasting of any peculiar excellence in your steed, he should invariably take the first opportunity of showing himself to be in a diametrically opposite humour to that for which you have been praising him? Why is it that no sooner are the words out of your lips, "This horse has never yet given me a fall," than down he goes neck-and-heels over a contemptible place at which a donkey would be ashamed to make a mistake? and that the docile animal, whom you have been recommending for his immoveable steadiness and general good conduct to carry a nervous lady or timid elderly gentleman, should, in the immediate presence of the disbelieving purchaser, think it necessary to squeal and gambol like the veriest two-year-old that ever ran unbroken in his paddock? As

are other horses, so was Blueskin. Contrary to all previous experience, he was evidently in that disagreeable state which ladies call "frisky," and apologists "fresh;" and when I saw the awkward manner in which the Doctor climbed into the saddle, and gathered his reins up all of a heap, I confess I began to have misgivings as to the result.

"I say, he's—he's—very quiet, isn't he?" asked the breathless equestrian, as the horse sidled away amongst his old friends the hounds, snorting, shaking his head, and "reaching" at his bridle, in a manner which much discomposed the security of his rider's seat. "These large horses require a deal of holding," added he, half ashamed of his want of skill in the *manége*, as, with mounting colour, he knotted his reins and crammed his hat down upon his head in a "do-or-die" sort of fashion which was anything but suggestive of a pleasant excursion; but the Doctor was now in for it, and being a gallant little fellow at heart, there was a game sparkle in his eye that, with all his misgivings as to the result, showed he "meant mischief."

My attention, however, was soon taken up with the many and onerous duties of my posi-

tion; and, after much consultation with the sporting agriculturists who constituted my field, we hastened to dispose ourselves over the surrounding country, and spread abroad in every direction, peeping into furrows and lashing turnip-tops, in the orthodox manner of performing that not very enlivening ceremony denominated "drawing for a hare."

The farmers were a capital set of fellows, thorough sportsmen one and all; the country, a wild district, with few resident landlords, and totally unpreserved. Coursing was a favourite amusement with the aboriginal inhabitants; and I have no doubt that whenever a poor man wanted a brace of partridges or a pheasant, he went to look for them without more ado. All this might be very pleasant, but, as may be supposed, was not conducive to the superabundance of game. At three o'clock in the afternoon we were still pursuing a fruitless search for the object of our chase without having experienced any excitement or amusement, save what may have been derived from the hapless "medico," who tumbled off Blueskin at two successive leaps; but, nothing daunted, resumed his precarious situation on "the pigskin," and, borrowing a penknife from

the whipper-in, shortened his stirrup-leathers to an unheard-of brevity, and with a fortitude worthy of a nobler cause, shook his feathers, and was "up and at it again!"

"There do be mostly a heer in Varmer Vowles's turmits," said the last of my attendant pedestrians, as he pointed to a small enclosure, bordering on the open moor, and signified his intention of "cutting it" if this final chance should prove a blank; and, indeed, by this time the hungriest of my field had departed for their comfortable homes, where the pudding was already being spoiled, and my retinue was reduced to the horse-breaker (who had no dinner to go to); the occupier of the turnips alluded to, on a stout black pony; the indefatigable Doctor, my boy "Bill," and myself. A wilder spot of ground could hardly be conceived than that on which we now found ourselves. The small enclosure we were entering bordered upon a steep narrow dingle, covered with small patches of gorse, which, scattered more and more thinly as the ground ascended, gave place at length to an expanse of open moorland, bounded as far as the eye could reach only by its own black sky-line; a few groups of fir trees served to mark

the extent of this undulating tract; and as the farmer got off his pony to remove a low sheep-hurdle (an operation the horse-breaker saved him the trouble of completing by knocking it all to shivers) he remarked: "The morland heers be woundy stout 'uns," and opined the Squire (meaning me) would have enough to do in "catching on 'em, if so be as we was lucky enough to be concerned with an old Jack as knew the trade and was pretty stout of heart!"

The words are scarcely out of his lips when Woldsman and Jezebel, feathering down a furrow, throw their heads into the air, and burst forth in a melody which awakens a chorus of harmony from the rest of the pack. Ere I have time to collect my scattered ideas—ere I am conscious that the horse-breaker's four-year-old is rearing straight on-end, too frantic to be prevailed on to go one way or the other—that "Bill," having got them together with two cracks of his whip, is sticking his spurs in up to the rowels, and "setting-to" like a workman—that the strokes I hear, applied so vigorously and in such rapid succession, are from the stalwart farmer cudgelling his pony; and that Blueskin, having completely over-

powered the Doctor, is now tearing away at the very outside pace which a somewhat slow horse can command—I find myself, I scarcely know how, across the dingle—through the gorse-bushes—all plain sailing before me—standing up in my stirrups, laying hold of the brown horse's great fiddle-head, and galloping for bare life after those streaming hounds, which, as they scour along over the level moor, heads up and sterns down, in the mute ecstasy of a burning scent, I can scarcely believe are my own steady, sedate, "tow-rowing," close-hunting, pack of harriers! The force of habit induces me to fumble for my horn; but I am not yet sufficiently skilled in music to combine a solo on that instrument with the Derby pace at which I am compelled to go along; and there are no stragglers to bring up—no, they are all forward, eleven couple of them, and racing over the heather like mad. We shall burst this hare in ten minutes—kill her and get home before dark. But where are my field? A deep holding patch of black half-boggy surface obliges me to reduce my pace, and I look around me at what I must necessarily call my companions in misfortune. The horse-breaker, his red neckcloth streaming in

the wind, his knees up to his pommel, and his hands up to his chin, has got the four-year-old tolerably steadied by the unmerciful pace at which he has come, and is now gallantly holding his own in a style which I cannot help thinking "dealer's condition" will be unable to sustain. Bill, a precocious urchin for his years, who, when I hired him as a quiet lad to do odd jobs about the stable, had the impudence to enumerate his only two qualifications, as being able "to holler and ride," is slightly a-head of me, down wind of the hounds, and with his feather weight and every turn in his favour, going so much at his ease, that I determine to take that horse from him and ride him myself in future. The stout farmer, far in the rear, and utterly hopeless of ever seeing us again, is still licking the pony. Whilst Doctor Dott, who, since he has got a pull at Blueskin, has been riding behind me, line for line and foot for foot, so close that any mistake on the part of my horse must inevitably result in my instantaneous destruction by my pursuer, now comes up alongside, bathed in perspiration, and in a perfect ecstasy of delight.

"Capital horse, sir," says the Doctor;

"what a line!—what a country!—what a moment!!"

But there is no time for congratulations, as the hounds, after a momentary check, have stooped again to the scent, and are running faster than ever. See, they top that ragged stone wall, which grins at us in uncompromising hideousness as we get nearer and nearer, and the unavoidable obstacle looms larger and larger; it stretches to the horizon on either side, and we must indeed "jump, or else go home." Bill flies it like a bird; the horse-breaker and the four-year-old follow him over, in a sort of complicated scramble. Now for it, Doctor!—the little man is boiling with excitement, and goes at it forty mile an hour—Blueskin jumps it like a deer; but the hapless novice, describing a rapid parabola in the air, shoots over the astonished horse's head, and forms a spread-eagle on the resounding turf with a thump that makes my teeth feel loose in my head! Game to the last, he retains his hold of the bridle, and though dragged upwards of twenty yards by the impatient Blueskin, succeeds in stopping and remounting him without losing his place. The little man is a right good one after all, if he had

only had practice. My horse gets over, but dislodges two or three stones, as though to give me a gentle hint that this sort of fun is not to go on all day; and welcome indeed is the check which takes place half a mile further on, and enables us to come up really with the hounds, and give a moment's breathing-space to our panting horses.

"Forward, lads—forward, sir—" says Bill, as the hounds, dashing once more to the front, begin work again as though there was to be no end to it. "No hare this, sir; my life on it we have got an old dog-fox before us, and *we'll* have his nose, my little darlings," adds the presumptuous youth, as he sticks *my* spurs into *my* horse, and rides to *my* hounds, as if he were a peer of the realm. Sure enough, the line is still forward, and the pace still good. Blueskin is getting confoundedly blown; the horse-breaker, it is evident, cannot last ten minutes longer; and the merry harriers, not adapted either by breeding or condition for this sort of rapid and protracted locomotion, are tailing most woefully; the dwarf fox-hounds, particularly two insubordinate puppies lately drafted from Squire Topthorne's, are racing away at head; the legitimate harriers, throwing

their occasional tongues as if to claim some participation in the sport, are moiling on as they best can, in a tolerably compact body; whilst the southern-crossed and beagle-bred line-hunters, scattered for miles upon our track, are limping and yowling in the rear. Once we turn as if for the low country, and I confess my hopes are aroused that we may soon be about to conclude the performance; but no! a sharp turn *up wind* brings us back more decidedly upon the moor, and I can see no reason in the world why we should not go on till to-morrow evening. Meanwhile, grief and persuasion are the order of the day for the quadrupeds. The last farewell look which I cast at the horse-breaker shows that pitiless worthy standing on his own short legs, ruefully contemplating the hapless four-year-old, who, with head and tail erect, nostril distended, and his feet resolutely planted as widely as possible from each other towards the four points of the compass, offers a flagrant example of that helpless state which metaphorical wags describe as being "done to a turn." Bill is going best. My horse is by no means comfortable, and seems to think a strong severe bit a delightful support to lean upon. Blueskin is lobbing

on; but the pace at which he bustled away with the Doctor during the first burst has told tales, and I calculate another seven minutes ought about to finish *him*. The farmer has been told off a long time. We have been running an hour and twenty minutes, and it is getting dark.

What do I see?—another stone wall looming through the rapidly-increasing obscurity, and the hounds topping it like a cataract. No power on earth shall induce me to follow that dare-devil Bill in his mad career; and, cautiously dismounting, I establish a gap, through which the still-excited Doctor and myself drag our jaded steeds. How quickly it gets dark! As we remount, and, with much exertion, "boil up" a sort of apology for a canter, Bill and the leading hounds are completely out of sight. Here and there a white speck, fleeting along through the gloom, shows where some champion of the kennel is vainly struggling to resume his place amongst his forward comrades; whilst "Tumbler" and "Tuberose," their great square heads drooping to the earth as they labour along at my horse's heels, look piteously up at me, as though to say, "What could induce a respectable, steady-

going, pack of harriers to embark upon such a harum-scarum performance as the present?" for long we have lost sight of the main body, and been guided in our course only by the rapidly-failing cry of the hounds still in chase. At length this last auxiliary deserts us, and we pull up in sheer despair; for it is now pitch-dark, and the surface of the moor, at no time much to be depended upon, is not to be traversed on horseback except by daylight. The situation is not without its romance; but the facts are extremely uncomfortable—not to say disheartening. The Doctor's figure looms like some phantom horseman by my side; and although I cannot distinguish his face, the joyous rapidity of his utterance, the triumphant swagger of his tone, betoken that he at all events is entirely satisfied with his heroic achievements and his day's amusement.

"What a run! Mr. Nogo; quite unparalleled, sir, I should conceive. Famous horse, this—never *was* so carried. How far may we be from Wildwood?—you know the road, of course." Alas! I was obliged to confess my total ignorance, not only of the country in which we now found ourselves, and the distance we were from our dinner, but likewise of the

whole bearings of this thinly-inhabited district, and of any the most remote chance there was that we should obtain shelter for the night. This was a damper even for the Doctor's enthusiasm; but the excitement had not yet subsided, and he bore it gallantly enough, considering his state of soreness and fatigue. Alas! he was destined to experience a more effectual cooler ere the conclusion of his adventures.

"I think we are on a track," said I, peering over my horse's head, as I fancied his feet rung on somewhat harder soil.

"Shall I get down and feel?" replied my companion, willing at any risk to obtain a change of position.

As the Doctor staggered down from the saddle, the sky lifted a little, and enabled us to distinguish a long low line of dark objects that might possibly be farm buildings; and I even fancied I discovered something like a glimmer of light, as it were from a casement, in the indistinct mass.

"All right," said the Doctor, stepping cautiously on, in front of his horse, as I called his attention to the probable refuge; "and here there seems to be a road—a white chalk road

—if we could but get down this bank to it. What a comfort, a good hard road!" added he, as the indistinct bundle, which I knew to be his figure, disappeared totally from my sight; and Blueskin, tired as he was, started back with a loud snort. In another second a tremendous splash, followed by a succession of plunges and spattering,

> "Just like unto a trundling mop,
> Or a wild goose at play,"

from my alarmed and totally-immersed comrade, convinced me that the Doctor's good hard road was a wide brook, a navigable canal, or some other deceptive form of the comfortless and limpid element.

"Help!" sputtered the Doctor as he came to the surface, where, despite of my most strenuous endeavours, I found it impossible to distinguish him. "Help! Mr. Nogo! I shall be drowned!—what a conclusion!" and, leaving the horses to their fate, I scrambled down the bank, and found my unfortunate friend standing up to his shoulders in water—for though the brook was of no great depth, it must be remembered that neither was the Doctor a man of colossal proportions—and

totally unable, even with all the assistance I could render him, to extricate himself from his dangerous and uncomfortable position. A faint moon, struggling through the stormy sky, looked down in pitiless indifference on the clear cold surface of the stream, relieved by our two struggling figures (for I was hauling at the Doctor with might and main); whilst a thick bush of alders and an old pollard willow, standing out against the fitful, stormy sky, gave a desolate and hopeless appearance to the scene. What was to be done? haul as I would I could not get him out; and the poor little man, what with cold and apprehension, was fast becoming more and more helpless. In this dilemma, it occurred to me that I had better begin to "holloa" with might and main, and at least take the chance of those buildings being inhabited which I felt confident I had seen. Accordingly I began to roar out, at the utmost pitch of my voice, the alarming cry of "Murder!—Help!—Murder!" accompanied, though in feebler tones, by the failing soprano of the chattering Doctor. Ere long I had the satisfaction of seeing lights distinctly glimmering at no great distance, and in the direction where I had

before supposed there stood an inhabited house; and, as we redoubled our cries and exclamations, we were cheered by the tones of a gruff voice shouting, in accents of mingled anger and anxiety, "Where be ye?—we're a-coming!—Here, Giles! Tummas!" till a few more exclamations from the exhausted Doctor brought a powerful auxiliary to our rescue in the shape of a sturdy West-country farmer, accompanied by two ploughmen and a lantern; who, after much difficulty in finding out our actual position, and a somewhat prolonged dialogue exchanged between the rescuers on the bank and the sufferers in the bed of the stream—for in my efforts to extricate the Doctor I had myself got in up to my waist—succeeded in hauling us by main strength to "*terra firma*," where, with natural curiosity, he proceeded to inquire how we came into our present plight, and what train of events had produced the very unusual spectacle of two dismounted gentlemen, clad in hunting costume, standing waist-deep in water, towards the commencement of a dark and stormy winter's night.

"Glad to see ye, Squire Nogo," said the hospitable yeoman, as he strode before us to-

wards his farm, greedily listening to an explanation—"Glad to see ye, even in such a plight as yon. My men'll find your horses, I'll warrant, and hounds as well; and, meanwhile, you're heartily welcome—and you too, sir." With which words, he ushered us into his ample, clean-looking kitchen, where a blazing fire, lighting up all the etceteras of that most comfortable apartment, vividly suggested to us the kindred ideas of supper, warmth, and accommodation, which but a few minutes before had seemed so utterly hopeless and unattainable. The host was in earnest, the hostess active, and the visitors nothing loath to be comforted; and when, an hour afterwards, I stretched my legs beneath the farmer's mahogany, in his best parlour, and surveyed myself in a suit of his homely clothing, "a world too wide" for my less robust proportions, I forgot my hounds, I forgot Bill, I forgot Mrs. Nogo, and, mixing myself a steaming glass of hot gin-and-water—no bad conclusion to a plentiful repast of cold boiled beef, hot eggs and bacon, the richest of home-made butter and cheese, and the strongest of home-brewed ale—I pledged my jolly host, with a lively perception of that merriest of all

"symposiums," an accidental jollification—that greatest of all luxuries, rest after labour, ease after anxiety, internal warmth after external cold—in fine, pleasure after pain.

As for the Doctor, to use a common but forcible expression, there was "no holding him." Enveloped—I may say lost—in the farmer's clothing, nothing much more ridiculous can be conceived than the little man, holding his half-emptied tumbler to his eye, and pledging his delighted host with an enthusiasm hardly warranted even by such an occasion as the present. Cæsar after Actium, Napoleon after Austerlitz, Wellington after Waterloo, were but faint examples to typify that hero which the Doctor felt himself in his own person. What was it to him that the harriers were probably lost? that Bill was undoubtedly, at that moment, bivouacking with a tired horse on the open moor? that he himself would unquestionably be crippled for a fortnight by his day's work, and, in all likelihood, rheumatic for life, from his evening's immersion? What was that? Had he not gone a run? Had he not ridden, to his own satisfaction, in what would hereafter take its place in the annals of the country as "Squire Nogo's day with a

wild fox"? Had he not jumped a veritable hunter over a real stone wall? and was he not sitting in a strange farm-house, the actual impersonation of one of Alken's successful sportsmen, who, having tired his horse and worn out his clothes, is dependent for shelter and costume upon the first stranger that may take pity on his forlorn condition? All this the Doctor felt; and, to give him his due, he acted the character well. As the gin-bottle waned, and fresh kettles of hot water steamed upon the hob, so did the still-commencing relation of the medico's exploits trench more and more upon the marvellous—border more and more on the sublime. With a vividness of description, not to be brought out by any liquid save "hot with," brewed by the orator to his own peculiar fancy, he recounted his adventures and his success. How he had mastered the grey horse—"a hunter that nothing but a workman could ride;" how he had viewed the hounds away, and told "Bill" he was sure "it was to be a run;" how he had *led the field* over the five-foot wall! and distinguished himself when even Mr. Nogo's horse was beat! how he had preserved his presence of mind when on the point of destruction in "the river

at the back of the house, sir;" and how nothing but his extraordinary proficiency in swimming "had preserved him from an untimely death"—all this he told again, with a delight that, much as it amused our open-mouthed host, it was impossible for him not to share; and when, towards eight o'clock at night, "Bill" made his appearance with the lost hounds and the head and brush of the game fox, that they had gallantly accounted for, some twenty minutes after we had declined the chase, and that they had eaten in the dark, with no other witness than my undeniable young whipper-in, whose presence at the finish seemed little short of miraculous, the Doctor, whose triumph wanted but this culminating *finale*, embraced us all round, with tears in his eyes, and, falling prostrate on the ground, was carried off to his dormitory, a Bacchanalian Nimrod, feebly struggling with his potations, and to the last endeavouring to describe to us how well he had been going all day, and the exact method in which Blueskin had jumped the wall, &c.

Luckily for my hounds, Bill, though not knowing the least where he was, had hit upon a cart-track, which, after many circumvolu-

tions, at last led him through the darkness to the very farm-house we were occupying; and by ten o'clock men, hounds, and horses, snug and warm for the night, were enjoying that repose which an unusually severe day renders so grateful to man and beast. The last toast proposed by our hospitable entertainer, after we had disposed of the Doctor, was, "Success to fox-hunting!" and I sought my welcome couch with the stentorian refrain of his jolly song, "Tally-ho the hounds, sir!" ringing in my ears. Nor was it without many a kind invitation to return, and many a hearty good wish, that he allowed us to commence our homeward journey on the morrow, jaded, stiff, and weary, but triumphant notwithstanding; though I am bound to confess that the Doctor had a splitting headache, and I myself was not without misgivings as to the sort of reception which, after "being absent without leave all night," I should experience from Mrs. Nogo.

CHAPTER XI.

"They reached the hotel; forth streamed from the
front-door
A tide of well-clad waiters, and around
The mob stood."

Don Juan.

"And laughed, and blushed, and oft did say
Her pretty oath by yea and nay
She could not, would not, durst not play.
At length, upon the harp, with glee,
Mingled with arch simplicity,
A soft, yet lively air she rung,
While thus the wily lady sung."

Marmion.

I KNEW how it would be. "Such conduct," as Mrs. Nogo remarked, "must never be repeated. Was it to be borne that, not satisfied with neglecting her by day, in the pursuit of those field-sports which rendered me so fa-

tigued in the evening that a hog would have been a livelier, and less snoring companion for the drawing room—not content with lavishing my energies, and wasting my substance in these ridiculous attempts at achieving fame as a sportsman—attempts which met with invariable failure and derision, I should likewise *make a practice* of leaving my home at daybreak, and regardless of the terror I inflicted on the weak nerves of my delicate spouse, spend the night in carousing with boon companions at some disreputable farmer's, and return the following day glorying in, rather than ashamed of, such an utter subversion of all marital duties, and domestic subordination?"

Such is an abbreviated summary of the lecture which Mrs. Nogo thought proper to inflict as a slight castigation for my misdemeanours, on the eventful day that witnessed the triumph of my gallant little pack, and the first and last appearance of enthusiastic Doctor Dott in the hunting-field. But alas! this was not all. So good an opportunity of at once assuming the reins of government was not lost on the female diplomatist at the head of the home department. The agitation of mind

endured for my sake (how could I resist such an *argumentum ad hominem?*) very naturally brought on one of those organic affections of the nerves, which, I need not call on the heads of families to bear me witness, so mysteriously baffle constitutional vigour and professional skill. Little Doctor Dott shook his head as though conscious that he too was in the scrape; while he avowed his utter inability to minister relief to this inexplicable affliction. Aware that he had participated in its origin, he felt so uneasy in the immediate presence of the sufferer, that he implored me to allow him to curtail his visit, and return forthwith to the bosom of his family, and that London practice, which he always thought it necessary to extol as "equal to that of the late Sir Henry Halford—a weight of responsibility, Mr. Nogo, that few shoulders could bear."

"But, at least," said I, "before you go, Doctor, set my mind at ease by recommending some beneficial treatment for Mrs. Nogo, as I am exceedingly anxious about her state of health."

"Not the slightest cause for alarm, my dear sir," was the reply. "Between ourselves, in professional confidence, Mrs. Nogo is as well

as you or I; but—" (and here the Doctor laid his finger to his nose, and looked unutterable things) "your good lady will never get better here. She has taken a dislike to the place, sir; and consequently it disagrees with her. Take her away, Mr. Nogo; take her to Leamington, Cheltenham, Malvern, Bath—anywhere you think you can command a certain amount of gaiety and amusement, and I am prepared to stake my reputation as a physician, that she is quite recovered in a fortnight."

Such was the farewell advice of my kind-hearted friend, as I packed him up in the dog-cart on his return to the metropolis; and when I thought it over in my own mind, and found with what avidity the idea was seized upon by my wife, I resolved—though sorely against my inclination—upon quitting Wildwood, selling the harriers, breaking up the establishment, and leaving the farm to take care of itself—a method that, at least, could not pay *worse* than the present one. No sooner had this course been decided on, than I had reason to admire Doctor Dott's professional foresight, in the immediate improvement which took place in my wife's health; and by the time our arrangements for de-

parture were concluded, and Bath—that city of precipices—fixed upon as our temporary residence, she was so well, that for the life of me I could not perceive any reason why we should go away at all. However, it was too late to repent. The farm-house was shut up, the furniture put away and covered, the stables deserted and desolate, with here and there a melancholy pitchfork propping the open door of some comfortless loose-box—for I had sent on the three horses I determined to keep, that I might get a little hunting during my banishment. The kennels were cleaned and emptied; the very garden looked like a wilderness; and as the woman "left in possession," with soapy arms, and coarse apron curiously folded round her skirt, made her farewell curtsey, and shut the front-door upon our departing carriage, I threw myself into the corner of the vehicle, and for the first time in my life felt very much disposed to quarrel with Mrs. Nogo, for the unfeeling state of high spirits in which she left her home.

What a contrast was it, after a few hours of travelling, to rattle up to the door of the White Rose Hotel, where we had determined to take up our abode until we could procure a

suitable residence in the valetudinarian city of Bath! How the post-boy, conscious of the dignity which in these railroad days is attached to a real travelling-carriage and appendages, boiled up his merriest canter, to stop dead-short with a jerk that nearly sent my nose through the front-window! How the magnificent proportions of "James" and his cauliflower-head struck dumb the throng of idlers, who are always ready to witness the descent of a private individual from his carriage! How the landlord attended Mrs. Nogo into his house, with a deference usually reserved for princesses of the blood; while the head-waiter—a privileged and plethoric individual in black silk shorts and gold knee-buckles—asked after my brother-in-law, Mr. Topthorne, and "hoped I had enjoyed good sport with my 'ounds"! How the ostlers and attendants without, and the chambermaid and boots within, all seemed to know me personally as a friend, and to revere me immeasurably as a superior; and how I hugged myself in the conviction that although I might have driven up to the door of the Clarendon, nor found that the name of Nogo commanded attention from one regardless functionary of

that metropolitan establishment, yet my arrival at the "White Rose Hotel," Bath, was heralded with all the honours, and attended with all the distinctions due to a visitor whose stay was likely to be prolonged to an indefinite length, and whose bill would bear due proportion, multiplying its items and increasing in its volume, as the termination of his sojourn was further and further postponed!

"The bill of fare, Sir—this morning's paper—list of visitors in Bath—and card of appointments of the hounds!" wheezed the fat waiter, as he entered our sitting-room with all these important documents in his hands.

"Like to see your apartments, Ma'am?" added an elderly and smartly-dressed female, who had evidently made a capital race with the waiter up-stairs, and only been beaten on the post.

"I trust you will find the suite of rooms I have prepared comfortable," continued the landlord, as, following on the heels of his myrmidons, he conducted us through a labyrinth of passages, and across spacious and stately halls, to the comfortable dormitories prepared for our reception.

And here I leave Mrs. Nogo, in her glory,

to arrange with James about bringing up cap-boxes, parcels, and imperials, and with her own Abigail and all the chambermaids, to discuss warming, airing, and unpacking, whilst I flee from the inextricable confusion to consult with my first friend, the fat waiter, as to ordering dinner, and afterwards to refresh my agitated mind with a stroll through the town.

"There is no solitude like solitude in a crowd;" but at the same time, few things are more amusing than to find oneself suddenly dropped among a set of people, to all of whom one is unknown, and to be able as an *unobserved observer* to watch the habits, and study the peculiarities of these unconscious fellow-creatures. I knew nobody in Bath, and nobody knew me; and as I turned down Milsom-street, at that hour in the afternoon the fashionable resort of all the distinguished individuals whose names I had perused in the Visitor's List at the "White Rose," I felt the same sort of interest in remarking on the customs and manners of the aborigines, as if I had been a visitor in Paris, a stranger in St. Petersburgh, a wayfarer in Warsaw, or a missionary swaggering down the principal promenade of that enlightened capital

which rejoices in the residence of His Majesty the King of Congo. Nor was I destined to remain long without exercise of my perceptive faculties. Groups of "fashionables" thronged the street on either side, and, like the figures in a *spectacle* "got up regardless of expense" by the spirited lessee of a minor theatre, I remarked that those who challenged my admiration as they sauntered down the street on this side, failed not in due rotation to reappear, slowly toiling up the steep ascent of the opposite pavement, again to pass before my eyes, now beginning to recognize their respective toilettes on their downward career, and so on *ad infinitum*, in what could not but appear to me a circular course of labour in vain.

Ere I had been thus occupied for half an hour, I began to make acquaintance with the forms and features of the well-dressed individuals thus continually passing in review before me, and to speculate on the different characters and pursuits of these indefatigable promenaders. Here I beheld, with an admiration not wholly unmingled with awe, the *passée* beauty, for whose failing charms, alas! even the healing waters of King Bladud, recom-

mended in sheer despair by the "family physician," must prove a hopeless remedy. In vain to o'erlay that parchment skin with paint, and plaster it with cosmetics; in vain to conceal that grizzled "crop" beneath those dark, flowing ringlets, shorn from some guilty head, whose very beauty, perhaps, was the primary cause of the female convict's disgrace and punishment; as she minces down Milsom-street in shoes a "world too tight" for those lame and swollen feet, not all the charm of "manner," not all the hypocrisy of "dress," can conceal the unwelcome fact that the toast of long-forgotten revellers, the "flower" of days gone by, has shrivelled into an ugly old woman at last! But see with tottering step and bow of the old school (alas! that its flexibility should be so damaged by chronic rheumatism) a cotemporary Damon staggers up to this antiquated Phyllis, and in croaking tones they exchange greetings and inquiries, mutual compliments, and welcome bits of scandal, with an eagerness and a concern which prove how anxious they still are to retain their slippery foot-hold in society—how they are still gasping and struggling to stem "the tide, nor leave the world which leaveth them." And now a

fine old admiral, frank of countenance and bluff of bearing, but whose limbs, alas! "the bullets and the gout" have rendered incapable of supporting his jolly frame, is wheeled up in an invalid's chair, which, much to the danger of the toes of an inattentive public, he persists in steering himself, and joins these faded fashionables, to whom he forms a pleasing and instructive contrast. The living stream thus stemmed for an instant, rapidly accumulates its volume of idlers, and ere long the pavement is blocked up by the gossiping throng. A tall, handsome girl, with bright sunny ringlets (such an one—so thinks ancient Phyllis—as she herself was not *so very* long ago!), chaperoned by a stout lady, who is doubtless the mamma, forms an additional attraction to the group, and accounts by her presence for the number of young gentlemen who swell the conclave, and offer to the curious in costume an interesting study indeed. Various are their garments; and of a cut and texture seldom seen, save amongst their own immediate set. But the prevailing taste appears to be a habit in which the wearer, without the slightest inconvenience to himself, is prepared to jump into the saddle, and ride to London at a

moment's notice. That noble animal, the horse, furnishes with his accoutrements the favourite ornaments of these his adorers. As the ladies of ancient Rome caused their jewels to be shaped into such talismanic forms as were best appreciated by those virtuous matrons, so does Young England, in its outward adornment, affect an equine style of decoration, which shall argue a corresponding taste within; and whilst a turquoise horseshoe fastens the folds of a cambric bosom, picked out with Derby-winners, the snaffle connects his button-holes, the curb-chain secures his watch, and the top of his walking-stick is dignified with a representation (wrought in the precious metal) of that quadruped to whom certain cynics will opine the owner is but a first-cousin once removed.

What a relief to discover the honest, handsome countenance, to recognize the manly simplicity of dress which distinguishes my friend Joe Bagshot, amongst this bevy of second-rate dandies! His greeting is kind and cordial, as usual; he links his arm within mine, and soon in our multitude of confidences and inquiries we forget faded belles, superannuated bucks, mutilated warriors, juvenile

tigers, Milsom-street, Bath, and all but our own concerns and our own proceedings.

"Kate will be so glad to hear you have arrived!" says my friend, "come to us to-morrow evening at half-past eight. She has a sort of quiet 'at-home' in our small house. I cannot ask you to dinner, old fellow, for our cook gave up her place yesterday, because Kate objected to her wearing her hair in long ringlets: only don't say I told you so; but drop in to-morrow night, any time before twelve, and bring Mrs. Nogo with you."

And with these words—it being now lamplight—my friend took leave of me on the steps of the "White Rose," and betook himself to his own home, and the society of his wife, who, I could not help suspecting, was a helpmate by no means adapted for my frank-hearted old schoolfellow.

The whole of the ensuing day we spent in what Mrs. Nogo terms "settling"—a mysterious evolution, of which it is difficult to describe the nature or the details. My own share of the performances was limited to an inspection of my stud, who had arrived the day before by the road, under the immediate custody of Bill, and had performed their journey

with the usual loss of condition and filling of legs, inseparable from a cavalry movement. Whilst I was feeling sinews and spanning joints, terribly swelled by that unnecessary punishment the animal inflicts on his own person, in what grooms term "hitting hisself," I had to listen to a tissue of complaints from my master-of-the-horse, as to the accommodation provided for himself and his charge. Of course the water was hard, the oats kiln-dried, the hay musty, the stable too low, ill-ventilated yet full of draughts, and "no servant in Bath could keep a horse's coat down in such a dog-kennel as this here." Then his own dormitory let in the rain, and did not keep out the cold, and "was not fit for a pig, let alone a Christian, to sleep in;" and it was not without the exercise of a good deal of patience, and the making of sundry promises of an alleviating tendency, that I effected an escape from my grumbling whipper-in.

A solitary walk to Lansdowne, for the sake of the fresh air, of which I obtained a sufficient quantum from the north-east, made me vote Bath the coldest place in England, and served to while away the afternoon till dinner-time, before which I had received a gentle hint from

Mrs. Nogo, it would be unnecessary for me to present myself, as I should only be "in the way," and interfere with the essential ceremony of "settling," which could not be concluded till that hour.

I have already confessed in these pages that I am an indolent man: shall I expose myself to the reader's contempt by likewise allowing that, without being exactly an "epicure," I am capable of appreciating and enjoying the good things of this world, when brought to perfection by a skilful practitioner in the art of cookery?

"I understand, Mr. Gibbon," said his anxious hostess to the illustrious historian, "that you are a great *gourmand?*"

"Pardon me, Madam—I am only a great glutton!" was the discerning reply of him whose pen has rescued from oblivion the costly dishes of a Domitian, the luxurious banquets of a Nero.

But without going quite so far as the candid confession of Mr. Gibbon, I am willing to concede that there are few corporeal enjoyments in this world superior to that of a good dinner, followed by a bottle of good wine, and all this properly consumed in agreeable society, and,

if in winter, by a cheerful fire; but a *sine quâ non* to the whole comfort of such an arrangement is, that digestion, which avowedly goes on best in a state of perfect repose, should not be interfered with by any labour or exertion whatever, whether of body or mind, and that the active duties of the day having been disposed of, the patient should be allowed to remain a certain number of hours undisturbed in his easy-chair, and only exchange that recumbent attitude for the more complete repose of his welcome couch. With these feelings, and these inclinations, can anything have been more disagreeable to me than the necessity of performing the duties of the toilette after dinner? To wash the post-prandial face in cold water—to imprison in starch and patent leather the well-fed frame, to whose swelling proportions a dressing-gown and slippers would be the most acceptable and appropriate costume—to exchange the cozy fireside, and the embraces of a roomy arm-chair, for the cold interior of a damp fly, and standing-room amongst a crowd of people whom one don't know—and above all, to do this without the satisfaction of growling, and with a smiling face, as though it were one of the greatest pleasures of life to

be thoroughly uncomfortable: if this is not domestic martyrdom, I should like to have a satisfactory definition of that very general infliction.

But, luckily, Bagshot's temporary home is but a few streets from the "White Rose;" and ere the jingling wretched fly has discomposed the muslin folds of Mrs. Nogo's well-chosen toilette, or shaken out one ringlet of her rich soft hair—and truth to say, I am somewhat proud of Mrs. N.'s taste in dress, and her magnificent "*chevelure*," in fact, I cannot conceal from myself the fact, which I think *she* has not yet discovered, that she looks "best of an evening"—we arrive at the place of our destination, and are admitted by a sober clerical-looking personage in black, hired for the occasion, who consigns us to the care of a pretty waiting-maid, in a wondrously-becoming cap, by whose dexterous assistance Mrs. Nogo is relieved of her ermine cloak and coverings, whilst I tie up travelling-cap and over-coat into a shapeless mass, and consign them to a heap of similar entanglements, with small hopes of ever seeing my property again. The house is small, though commodious; and ere I have settled myself well into my neck-

cloth, and got a tight kid glove partly on my left hand, I find myself following my better-half into Mrs. Bagshot's pretty little drawing-room; and, as I shake hands with my smiling hostess, admiring for the hundredth time the nameless fascination of her manner, and the admirable taste of her "get-up."

I confess myself to be a shy man—one of those unhappy individuals who, with a constant hankering after the pleasures of society, suffer torments only known to the diffident, under the gaze of their fellow-creatures, and dissemble with Spartan fortitude the pain inflicted on them by the casual observations which well-meaning neighbours address to those who are so obviously ill-at-ease with themselves. At a London party an immediate refuge presents itself in the vortex of the crowd, who, jammed together in a half-suffocated mass, neither know nor care for any other consideration than the facility of obtaining "the carriage," in order to go through the same martyrdom elsewhere. But here, in Bath, no such protection was afforded by the contracted circle that comprised the *élite* of that city; and small as was Mrs. Bagshot's drawing-room, it was not half full. Mrs. Nogo, who suffered as little from bash-

fulness as any other lady of a certain age (and it is curious to observe at how early a period the fair sex outgrow this weakness), was soon comfortably established as the centre of a small group of admirers—evidently old acquaintances; and chiefly of high military and naval rank, as indeed, from the obvious length of their services, they deserved to be. My friend Joe was busy making the agreeable to an elderly lady, adorned with a curious superstructure on her head, who, I concluded, was either his aunt, or an intimate friend of that important relative; and I had ample leisure, as I sipped the cup of weak tea offered me by the temporary butler—whose countenance I have since recognized at all the entertainments I have attended in Bath—to take a good look at the different individuals thought worthy to comprise one of pretty Mrs. Bagshot's "at homes." It speaks volumes for the tact and cleverness of the *ci-devant* "Kate Cotherstone," that short as had been her residence in this exclusive city, she had contrived to render her abode the resort of all who considered themselves "the best people" in its varied society; and an admission to one of her parties gave the fortunate visitor an immediate

footing amongst the local fashionables whom I now had an opportunity of studying in their natural element. The mass appeared chiefly to consist of persons—both ladies and gentlemen—considerably past the middle period of life, and with few exceptions, suffering from some bodily infirmity, the concealment of which afforded them a never-failing occupation. The gradations of rank, too, seemed to be known and observed with a degree of exactitude totally unprecedented in my previous experience of the law of precedence; although Burke or De Brett would hardly have recognized the claim to distinction put forward by the wife of a captain on half-pay, or the widow of a minor-canon. There were, however, two grand exceptions to the general run of commoners constituting this assemblage, in the persons of a dowager viscountess, and an earl's younger son; and the deference with which poor old deaf Lady Ricketts was listened to, and the Honourable Lionel Legerdemain toadied, were instructive proofs of the respect in which England still holds the illustrious ornaments of her aristocracy. The sufferings of poor Lady Ricketts from intermittent paralysis prevented her being anything more

than a passive recipient of the general homage she commanded; but Mr. Legerdemain's popularity did him, indeed, the greatest credit, inasmuch as there must have been some admirable though hidden virtues concealed beneath so unprepossessing an exterior, to render that short, thin, dirty, and vulgar-looking man the centre of an admiring crowd. Badly dressed, not half washed, and more than half drunk, he was relating to a listening circle that day's run with the stag-hounds; the chief merit of the performance being the fact that he had ridden nearly a hundred miles on the road, exclusive of hunting, since breakfast—and this feat, perhaps, in a measure accounted for his seedy appearance.

"'Main, my boy!" said a good-looking, fresh-coloured young gentleman, who seemed to derive much reflected honour from the familiar abbreviative, "'Main, my fine fellow! what did you do to-day with *The Buck?*"

"Ran ten minutes, and broke my horse's back," replies 'Main, who is evidently a man of few words.

"I'll mount you to-morrow with the Duke," good-naturedly suggests the pitying inquirer, who is basking in that time of life when the

loss of a horse is the greatest conceivable affliction.

"Wouldn't give a thank-you for foxhunting!" is the somewhat uncourteous reply, which, however, elicits a burst of applause from the attendant circle; and the young one, rather disconcerted, walks off to pay his court to Mrs. Bagshot, whilst 'Main confidentially whispers to a red-faced Irishman, with whom he seems most intimate, that "he shall go and smoke a weed at Joe's, and try for a drain, as this thing's mortal slow," and the honourable himself "curious thirsty." The baffled young gentleman who rejoices in the high-sounding appellation of Constantine, joined to the less ambitious patronymic of Slopes, is rather a favourite amongst the Bath ladies, being tolerably well-off, always exceedingly correct in dress, of fresh colour and curly hair, with a guileless expression of countenance, reminding one irresistibly of a sheep, and is extremely well received as he edges his way amongst sofas and ottomans to Mrs. Bagshot's side. Oh! Kate! Kate!—still as great a flirt as ever! Even in the absence of higher game, to think it worth your while to waste your artillery upon this harmless boy! Ere he has

exchanged three words with you, I can see by the nervous manner in which he shrinks from your eye, by the pinker colour that mounts to his chubby, unwhiskered cheek, as your thrilling tones fall upon his ear, that Constantine Slopes is a "gone 'coon!" The old story, Kate—you ought to be ashamed of yourself! "Sport to you, but death to him!" Mr. Slopes, probably for want of anything better to say, hazards a stammering request that "Mrs. Bagshot will give us a little music;" and the clergyman's lady, calm, radiant, and collected, sits down to the piano-forte, protected in flanks and rear by two post-captains and a Commander-of-the-Bath, *vis-à-vis* to a general officer with one leg, whose infirmity obliges him to remain seated, and assisted by Mr. Constantine Slopes, who hangs over the fair performer, and turns the leaves of her music-book, with an *empressement* that forcibly reminds me of days not long gone by, when I was as great a fool, as infatuated a victim as that simple young man. Who shall account for the fascination exercised by some women upon all who approach their sphere? The peculiar power of the rattlesnake, whose eye is said to lure the conscious victim unresistingly

to its doom, and the attractive properties possessed by certain ladies, and by them used with equal recklessness and cruelty, are two arrangements of Nature which make me a believer in "Mesmerism;" and I am convinced that Mrs. Bagshot possessed fully more than her share of the magnetic influence. What else could it have been that, ere she had run her fingers over the keys with her own peculiar touch, half through one of those complicated preludes she executed so brilliantly, drew me irresistibly towards the piano-forte from the other end of the room, and brought me, open-mouthed, to gaze and listen spell-bound by the enchantress, forgetful of the presence of my own legitimate Mrs. Nogo, the proximity of Joe—who, by the way, hated music—and all, but those sounds which bore me back upon the wings of harmony to the shades of Windsor, the green alleys of Virginia Water, the villa at Ascot, and the dreamy follies of the past?

Then, as if the music, accompanied by the half-reproachful glances shot at me from beneath those long eye-lashes, was not enough, Kate must needs complete the charm—thereto,

I acknowledge, incited by the supplication of Mr. Constantine Slopes—by warbling forth one of those plaintive ditties which people, who are not "by way of" singing, sometimes execute so beautifully and so touchingly. With just enough accompaniment to melt the tones gradually away; with just enough expression not to mar the plaintive simplicity of the sentiment; and with looks of pitiful tenderness that might have thawed St. Anthony into a sighing Strephon, and that *did* make me very uncomfortable, and caused young Constantine Slopes to shake like an aspen-leaf, she drew from the responsive chords a soul-stirring harmony as she poured forth her plaintive wail for

"THE DAYS WHEN WE MET.

"There is mirth in the sunshine, there's peace in the shade,
There's the fragrance of June on the flower;
There is love in the whisper that steals through the glade—
But the sunshine may pale, and the roses may fade,
And the skies may be dark in an hour;
And the heart may grow weary—the brain may forget—
And the loved one be changed since the days when we met.

"There is morning to hope for, when darkness is past;
There's a dawn that shall smile into day;
Though the winter be chill, and unsparing the blast,
Yet the flow'ret shall bloom in its spring-time at last,
And the bird carol forth from the spray.
But the heart hath no morrow, when its sunlight is set,
And its music is hushed since the days when we met.

"Will you seek for a blossom when the tree is laid low?
Will you look to find life in decay?
Is there joy in despair? is there laughter in woe?
Can you ask me to smile through the tear-drops that flow
For the hopes which have faded away?
No! the cheek shall be pale, and the eyelash be wet,
While I mourn all alone for the days when we met."

Amidst the applause that succeeded to the "voice of the charmer," I caught a glance from Mrs. Nogo which somewhat moderated the fervour of my approval, and a peremptory order to "see about the carriage!" sent me into the dark street to grope up and down for the fly which had brought us, and which, according to agreement, was to be ready to take us back. The interval having been whiled away by the driver in the consumption of exciseable commodities, we were not long on our homeward journey, and were soon arranged

for the night in our comfortable dormitory at the "White Rose."

Shall I confess that as I laid my head on the connubial pillow, the still-present "refrain" of "The Days when we Met" was yet ringing in my ears, undrowned by the confidential discussion that took place ere I was suffered to taste repose, relative to the merits and foibles of *my* old friend Mrs. Bagshot.

CHAPTER XII.

" ' Let me not live,' quoth he,
' After my flame lacks oil, to be the snuff
Of younger spirits, whose apprehensive senses
All but new things disclaim, whose judgments are
Mere fathers of their garments.' "
All's Well that Ends Well.

" Farewell ! with him alone may rest the pain,
If such there were—with *you*, the moral of his strain."
Childe Harold.

LIFE is a strange medley. As I sit here in lonely grandeur, the sole inhabitant of that great desert which constitutes the principal dining-room of the " Munchausen Club," I can scarce believe that the middle-aged member, whose bristling whiskers and incipient crow's-feet I can too plainly discern in yonder un-

flattering mirror, is the same Tilbury Nogo who, but a few short years before, bounded up the steps of this exclusive caravanserai with all the buoyant elasticity of youth, and swaggered through its halls, in the pleasing consciousness that "the world was all before him, where to choose." The very waiter seems to glance incredulously at the country-made boots and ill-fitting attire of a gentleman whom, it argues now no vanity to say, he remembers once the most particular in his *chaussure*—the most scrupulously correct in his attire. Well may he look as much astonished as a waiter is capable of looking—for these functionaries, like the chairs and tables with which they are chiefly associated, never grow old. For them, the spring-tide and winter of life are not. Who ever recollects to have seen a waiter either in the bloom of youth or the decrepitude of old age? If he should be short-winded and gouty, your father remembers him afflicted with these inconveniences when he himself was a young man. If he is light, wiry, and active—light, wiry, and active he will remain, when you are tottering upon crutches, or writhing on a water-bed. Leave England, to seek your fortune at the antipodes; pursue your search

after the fleeting jade from pole to pole; and when half a lifetime has elapsed, return to London, bankrupt at least in health and constitution, and so altered as not to be recognized by the very cousin with whom you have been brought up from a boy, walk into that club in which the wholesome rule, that "members abroad are not liable for their yearly subscriptions," has induced you to keep your name, and the same waiter, apparently in the same attire, offers you the evening paper, with the same flourish that used to call a smile to your countenance twenty years ago; and for a moment, the magic of association makes you feel as young as that evergreen attendant. Look at him: he is neither bent nor wasted, neither wrinkled nor grey; he always looked like a waiter, and he looks just as like a waiter now as he did before you went abroad. What is his secret? and can he be induced to part with it for love or money? Perhaps he has no family cares—Ah! the daily epistle from Mrs. Nogo, which the rogue presents on a silver salver, with a careless air that is enviable to a degree.

"Waiter, bring me a large glass of sherry, and a biscuit."

"Glass of sherry, Sir—yes, Sir. Biscuit, Sir—yes, Sir."

And now to see what information my news-loving lady can give me from Bath, where we still hold our head-quarters, and are considered, I rather flatter myself, what the purser's wife in "Peter Simple" calls the "Smiths, of London"—"quite the topping people of the place." She still crosses her letters word for word, and line for line; and her hand, though faint and ladylike in appearance, gets more illegible every day. I wonder if I shall have to come to glasses at last! However, with the assistance of alternate sips at the goblet of sherry, I manage to decipher the contents, which a respect for the confidence of conjugal correspondence prevents me giving *verbatim*, but by which I am glad to learn that "the cockatoo and the white mice are well, though the bullfinch has broken his leg!" (The reader will infer, from the importance of these pets, that my establishment is unblessed with a nursery.) "The mastiff puppy, as yet nameless, has been lost, and recovered at an enormous sacrifice; and Toko—a long-eared, useless spaniel—has been bitten by the butcher's dog. My own two hunters have the

influenza, and one of the carriage-horses is lame"—which bulletin concludes the domestic details of this daily report. The remainder of the epistle, like its predecessors, is full of that ever-increasing intelligence which men call news, and gods scandal, and for the growth of which the climate of Bath appears peculiarly favourable. From its perusal I learn that the Honourable Lionel Legerdemain has been concerned in some most equivocal proceedings on the turf, and that it is doubtful whether even his exalted rank will enable him to retain his position in the immaculate society of Bath; that old Admiral Dolphin is paralytic, and poor Lady Ricketts dead; and young Graceless—formerly of the Guards—has behaved shamefully to her niece; that venerable Miss Dido, supposed to be the most inveterate of spinsters, had been seen at ten o'clock at night walking with a man in a cloak, who, Mrs. Nogo's maid thought, was the postmaster at the corner, but whom Mrs. Champfront likewise saw, and declares to be Louis Napoléon; that people did more and more extraordinary things every day; and that she, Mrs. Nogo, did not know what the world would come to at last, etc., etc. The letter concluded

with an earnest hope that my business in London would soon be brought to a close, and was farther elongated by a postcript, to the effect that "she had just seen young Constantine Slopes driving four-in-hand down Lansdowne-place; and people received him just the same as ever; though what had become of *that* Mrs. Bagshot, she had not an idea—only it would be extremely painful, considering the relationship and all, if accident should ever bring them together." This last piece of intelligence set me ruminating upon the many changes that had taken place since my own marriage—our first establishment at Wildwood; the exploits of little Doctor Dott with the harriers; our removal to Bath, and the delightful *réunions* at Bagshot's house, of which Kate—the now-never-to-be-mentioned Kate—had been the ornament and the charm. Few were the years that had elapsed; and yet how far apart were the different individuals that had constituted those pleasant assemblages! My own wife a confirmed invalid, never leaving the vicinity of her physician; my brother-in-law Topthorne, who had given up his hounds, relapsing into a sort of yeoman—never seeing a visitor, never associating with

his equals, fast losing the manners and habits of a gentleman; poor Segundo fallen into the hanger-on of a sporting patron, who was himself obliged to reside at Boulogne, and living from hand to mouth in a foreign country—as, truth to tell, he was tolerably accustomed to living at home. Jack Raffleton, my early friend—the wildest of them all in his hot youth—was the only one of the lot whose after-career seemed prosperous and successful. But Jack, in all his escapades, was not only a thorough gentleman himself, but scrupulous only to associate with gentlemen; and this it was which invariably proved a safety-buoy to my volatile companion. Military distinction and a good appointment were doing their best for him in India; and the golden opinions which he gathered in command seemed equal to the popularity he had formerly enjoyed in a subordinate capacity. There was some comfort in knowing that Jack was getting on well. But poor Joe Bagshot! how could I bear to think of him—the merry, kind-hearted, manly, athletic Joe—now living in weary solitude at his vicarage, going through his daily round of parochial duties, in a subdued, broken-hearted frame of mind, for which those duties alone

appeared to possess the slightest interest. No more cricket, no more archery, no more joyful gatherings and active sports for that morose and altered man! They tell me his herculean frame is shrunk and wasted, and that premature old age has furrowed his open brow, and silvered the waving clusters of his nut-brown hair. Since the morning she left him, with young Constantine Slopes—and her infatuation for that uninteresting youth is as unaccountable as the admiration she was capable of inspiring in such a mind as her husband's—Joe had never been seen to smile. A strong moral sense of his duties, and the responsibilities of his calling, prevented my friend from taking such vengeance as human opinion esteems only just for the greatest injury man can inflict on man; and those alone can appreciate the struggle it must have cost him to forego the reprisals which society enforces, who know as well as I do his gallant, fearless spirit—his high and sensitive feelings of what the world calls honour. Poor Joe Bagshot! time will deaden the acuteness of the pang, but time will never be able to restore that image whose place is now desolate in your heart! The sunshine will never look as bright to you again in

this world; but take comfort, old friend! no one knows better than yourself that the end of all is not here: were it so, yours would indeed be a cheerless lot. Nor are my own reflections on the past untinged by that bitter drop which has turned your cup to gall. Knowing as I did the heartlessness and vanity of Kate Cotherstone's character—having myself so narrowly escaped shipwreck on the Circean rock—ought I not to have warned you ere it was too late? ought I not to have interposed between the moth and the candle—the frank, open-hearted country clergyman, and the wily, finished coquette? She married just to obtain a certain position in society: she left you, without a struggle, the instant a more brilliant career appeared to open itself before her: and I hear the young dandies, as they dawdle in here for their late luncheons, discussing, in their careless, hap-hazard manner, the wit, the tact, the accomplishments, and the beauty of Mrs. Bagshot, as she still dares to call herself; her interesting widowhood (that is now the *rôle*), her wonderful equestrian skill, her extraordinary taste, and the furniture of her house near Chesham-place.

"Oh, sin! oh, sorrow! and oh, womankind!"

How this taste for moralizing grows upon one! I conclude it is one of the prosy habits which too surely accompany the approach of maturity—that reflective period when man, having arrived at the culminating point of his career, gazes down, as it were from an eminence, on the prospect both before and behind him, but pauses chiefly to admire the landscape which he has already traversed, and prefers to dwell, not without exaggeration, on the past toils and triumphs of the half-completed journey, rather than look forward into the dim uncertainty of the future.

As I look back upon the follies and the failures of my irrevocable youth, it seems to me that, were it possible to turn back the wheel—had I the privilege of again living over those golden days which shall return no more—in no single instance should I act exactly as I have done; there has not been one occasion on which I should commit the same absurdities in the same manner. Whether the vagaries of a staid middle-aged gentleman, when submitted to the test of common sense, are less unaccountable than those of impetuous, impulsive boyhood, I leave to the attentive observer of human nature to determine. All I know is,

that, like the retrospective octogenarian, who summed up his whole reflections on existence with the conclusion that, "if he had to live his time over again, he would eat more and drink less," I am convinced that, though my follies might be equal in quantity, they would be essentially different in quality; though the madness were as apparent, the method would be by no means the same.

Like many a wiser and better man, I have been the victim of an unworthy ambition—not the noble infirmity which urges the aspirer to be great—not the heaven-born sentiment which impels him to be good; but the paltry, and unmanly thirst for frivolous distinction, which, originating in vanity, finds its end in disappointment and disgust. Not satisfied to take the sports and amusements of life as I found them, it has been my desire to raise for myself a kind of spurious fame for proficiency in pursuits which, after all, deserve but to be the pastime of an idle hour, and even this worthless distinction I have failed to attain. When the man who had spent a lifetime in learning to balance peas on the point of a needle, was brought before Alexander, the conqueror of the world ordered him the appro-

priate recompence of a packet of needles and a bushel of peas. Alas! my proficiency has not even deserved the Macedonian's sarcastic guerdon. Money, time, and perseverance have been wasted, and I cannot balance the pea on the needle after all! In vain have my stud eaten their heads off at Melton, and I myself gone to the height of personal inconvenience, not to say bodily peril, to achieve a first-flight character on the grass. Can I lay my hand on my heart, and tax my memory with one single instance on which, after hounds had been running hard for ten minutes, I was present in the same field with them? I have ridden a two-hundred-guinea hunter, and been pounded by young Graceless on a forty-pound hack! I have placed my horse's head at Lord Rapid's tail, and vowing to stick to him throughout the day, have lost him in three fields! No! High Leicestershire was no arena for my prowess; and hopeless as was my success in the pastures, the turf was even worse. What availed it to elbow my way into the waving mass which constitutes the Ring at Epsom; or to swagger, with open betting-book, and pencil daintily fitted between my front teeth, down the sunny slopes

at Ascot? The "make-and-shape" backer jumped at the odds I offered against his favourite, and showed his judgment by the form in which his selection swept past the goal an easy winner, and "the only horse I stood to lose by in the race;" or the better-informed leg, with his liberal investment against the Flyer that broke down this morning, gave me another opportunity of what is playfully termed "paying and looking pleasant." Shooting, deer-stalking, sparring, cricket, hare-hunting, rowing, fishing, etc., not forgetting my first and only appearance as a jockey at Weatherley—I have had a turn at them all—and if this be what is meant by "sowing wild oats," I can only say that in my case the crop has failed to pay the expenses of cultivation. My trip into the west of England, though in itself the accident of an accident—the consequence of a *fracas* in which I had no business to be concerned—was in its effect not the least important of my vagaries; and that, too, originated in my ambition to obtain a certain share of fame as a sportsman in that out-of-the-way locality. Of my visit to Squire Topthorne, I confess there did spring some very decided consequences; but with my conviction that, in

the words of Shakspeare, "your marriage comes by destiny," I forbear to make any reflections on that unavoidable catastrophe. And what has been the result of thus wasting the golden, the irretrievable years of early manhood—that important period in which alone can be laid the foundations for a future superstructure of utility and self-content, if not of distinction and renown—an edifice to which success in the more trifling pursuits of life should be but as the carving which decorates its pillars, the ornamental work which softens the severer grandeur of the whole?

A brief period of hollow excitement, constantly embittered by dissatisfaction and disappointment; a consciousness of time misspent and opportunities thrown away; something very nearly akin to remorse for the irremediable past; and above all, the degrading conviction that though age is steadily and surely stealing on, wisdom is still as far distant as ever, and the experience which makes "even fools wise" has in my own case been entirely thrown away.

"Could we but see ourselves as others see us," how different would be the estimate we should place on our characters! how much

less often should we hear it remarked of such an one, "that it would be well to buy him at the world's price, and sell him at his own." Were it possible to look into the hearts of those with whom we associate, and there read the opinions they really entertain of ourselves, the lesson, though totally upsetting the whole organization of society, would prove as instructive as it would unquestionably be disagreeable. Perhaps in London we have better opportunities than elsewhere of arriving, if we are not completely blinded by self-conceit, at our true value amongst our fellow-creatures. The young men of the present day are not prone, without some very cogent reasons, to conceal the unflattering opinion they seem to entertain of every one but themselves; and certainly that insincerity which would fain disguise the truth, simply because it is disagreeable, is not the failing of the age we live in. As I sit here in a window of "The Munchausen," and gaze upon the boundless prospect afforded by the opposite side of Pall-Mall, I study the manners and customs of the future promise of Great Britain, with a melancholy conviction that I am no longer one of themselves. Truth, however, compels me to state

that the few years which confer upon me what is ironically termed "the advantage" of them, totally fail to command that deference which, we are told, was in Lacedæmon the invariable tribute paid to old age. But little of the Spartan, save his courage, is to be traced in the Anglo-Saxon of the present day; and how that young gentleman now breakfasting on mulligatawney and old Madeira, at four P.M., would turn up his nose at black broth! But to return to my moralizing reflections on that position in society which I have failed to attain—that very youth who, because I have not the honour of his acquaintance, thinks it right to gaze upon me with a supercilious stare, as though I were some curious piece of upholstery badly covered, may perhaps chance to ask the waiter the name of that rural-looking gentleman who occupied the table next to our youth's protracted breakfast. "Nogo!"—ah! twenty-one summers have shed their sunshine on his clustering locks, but he has never heard of Mr. Nogo, and *therefore*, with a power of reasoning, a grasp of induction that does honour to his intellect, he concludes Mr. Nogo *must* be a snob! So much for the charitable opinions entertained on my behalf by those

who cannot boast the advantage of my intimacy. Now for the deferential homage I am to expect from those who can. In swaggers young Graceless—a great man at "The Munchausen," and though, as I happen to know, and as a reference to the "Army List" would bear me witness, no longer so *very* young as a slight figure and whiskers carefully shaved to the roots would lead the fair sex to suppose—yet by dint of buoyant spirits, consummate impudence, and unfailing tact, an authority amongst the juveniles whose oracles there is no gainsaying.

"What, Nogo—my antediluvian!" says the irreverent joker, as he pats me on the back with a cordiality which the London man can afford in empty February, but which dries up to an imperceptible nod and whispered "How-d'ye-do?" in crowded June; "I didn't know you were alive—but how old you are looking, and how fat!" glancing down with unconcealed satisfaction at his whipping-post of a frame. "Well, I'm glad to see you. If you are going along Piccadilly, come as far as Tatt's with me: Camarine's horses are to be sold, and I want to take the odds to a pony against "Bareface."

The old feeling steals upon me, and I link my arm in that of young Graceless, and ere I reach Hyde Park Corner the ruminations of the preceding half-hour have been forgotten; Bath, Mrs. Nogo, domestic responsibilities, the increasing corpulency, the irretrievable decade, are as though they were not. Tattersall greets me with a nod that would seem to infer he had seen me every day for a fortnight; and the ancient ambition, the foolish itching for sporting notoriety breaks out again as strong as ever. There is a chesnut mare of Lord Camarine's (a nobleman declining hunting for the best of all reasons, that his difficulties have forced him abroad), loudly celebrated by report for her capabilities as a fencer. What an animal, on which to acquire distinction as a bruising rider in the hunting-field! Who is that gentleman, who ought to know better, bidding in hundreds for this patent-safety conveyance, originally purchased for forty pounds by the dealer, who let "Camarine" have her as a favour at five hundred? "There is no fool like an old one!" that gentleman is Mr. Tilbury Nogo! Going! going! gone! It matters little whether the costly purchase was destined to become his property, or that

of some one obstinately determined to become even a greater fool than himself. Here let him take his leave of the patient reader, earnestly hoping that these few random sketches of his adventures, if they have failed to amuse, may at least have the credit of doing their best to warn that weary sufferer of the way in which he should not go—to point out to him the degrading annoyances, the petty vexations, that hover around the ill-omened path of an Unsuccessful Man!

SCOTLAND

AND

THE MOORS.

BY

TILBURY NOGO, ESQ.

SCOTLAND AND THE MOORS.

CHAPTER I.

"Backward, backward let me wander,
To the noble northern land—
Oh, my heart is sad and weary, &c."

Aytoun's Lays.

It is no use dilating on the miseries of London in August—every one, with the exception of an eccentric correspondent of the facetious Mr. *Punch*, seems agreed upon that point; and as my own opinion in this respect marches with the times, I had at an early period in the summer made my arrangements to breathe the mountain air, and breast the heathery "braes" of the north. Long before the middle of July I found myself repeating "The Lays of the

Scottish Cavaliers;" and "Scrope on Deer-stalking," "The Moor and the Loch," Mr. St. John's delightful excursions and adventures in the neighbourhood of the mighty Findhorn, and every other work connected with "the hills," formed the staple of my studies, and the subject of my thoughts. How I despised the blue-book, and contemned all balls but the Caledonian! how I adored the Puritani and the Lucia (mind I had never been across the border); I even went so far as to learn the Highland fling, up two flight of stairs, in a London lodging-house, in the dog-days, the step-accompanying bag-pipes causing the two respectable Quakers below to give immediate notice to quit, and driving an elderly gentleman, supposed at times to be rather flighty, smack into a lunatic asylum, where he is at this moment living on linseed tea and a vegetable diet. All this and more must be laid to the account of the Waverley mania; and right glad was I when the two companions with whom I had taken a moor far in the north announced themselves ready to start, and, as the ladies say, "fixed the day."

The night of the 7th of August was determined upon to embark on board a Scotch

steamer at Blackwall; the quantity of dogs (of which more anon), keepers, provisions, Fortnum and Mason's best, and other paraphernalia, making it advisable to proceed, *en masse*, over "the briny," instead of the infinitely shorter, though more confusing method, of the tea-kettle from Euston-square. Need I add that a dinner at Greenwich was the inevitable ante-consequence of our voyage? Of course we dined at the Trafalgar, and in one of that best inn's best rooms did we three—Beeswing, King Cob (so called from an old university nick-name), and the "humble individual now addressing you"—eat a dinner in the face of an afternoon sun, that Lucullus might have envied, and Heliogabalus himself could hardly have outdone. Oh, for the pen of Dr. Kitchener! oh for the ἔπεα πτερόεντα of Christopher North—not Christopher under canvass, but Christopher over the mahogany—to emblazon on the golden page of history that gorgeous repast, from its turtle thick and thin — its champagne, sweet and dry—its thousands of specimens of fishes—its millions of animalcula miscalled whitebait, and devoured with brown bread and butter—its Scotch pigeons—its tendrons de veau—its five magnificent courses

leading gradually on to a haunch of venison, and sloping off again through the gradations of a regular dinner of five more, to a cool bottle of claret (by the way, the least thing too cool), a cup of coffee, a glass of white brandy, and a cigar that came from "old Varginny a long time ago," through whose mazy wreaths we contemplated, as at a distance, the action we had been engaged in, and looked back with a calm and virtuous satisfaction on the prodigies we had performed.

The conversation going to the steamer was decidedly dramatic, and was carried on in the eastern fashion, by symbols and signs, rather than by the usual method of interchanging ideas amongst gentlemen; when we did condescend to talk, the spelling adopted in the *Fonetic Nûz*, as it calls itself, I should say would probably give the clearest idea of our conversation. The transition was, I believe, performed in a boat; Beeswing, who had travelled in many lands, being under the impression that he was navigating the Bosphorus, and being much disturbed with the idea of introducing two friends on board a Queen's ship, the quarter-deck of which he appeared convinced he was momentarily approaching.

King Cob, who was amiable and accommodating to an incredible degree, was most eager to pull—an exercise from which I with some difficulty dissuaded him, as I was myself anxious to solve a problem which had for some time puzzled me, namely, how many oars we had rowing us, and whether the stroke, a sturdy little waterman with an inflamed nose, was possessed of one eye or four.

"Not knowing the captain," said Beeswing, "and there being no admiral on the station" —what more difficulties he would have enumerated, or to what conclusion this train of reasoning was likely to lead, can never be ascertained, his reflections being here cut short by a bump and a sort of unpleasant heave, accompanied by a rushing sound of water, the tension of a boat-hook, and some valuable assistance under the arms from two powerful individuals. In another moment I was standing on a spacious deck, from whence I could see the lights from the shore reflected on the river till it seemed impossible to distinguish the real from the illusive; and then feeling conscious that the system was somewhat over stimulated, I had the sense to retire to my berth, leaving Beeswing fast asleep on one of

the horse-hair sofas in the saloon, and King Cob engaged in a most violent argument with a presbyterian divine, on the free kirk, the currency question, Puseyism, tithes, and the General Assembly, the worthy ecclesiastic appearing to be somewhat bewildered by the suddenness and volubility with which my friend jumped from one subject to another, and the inflexible obstinacy which he displayed upon them all.

Certainly the sensation of waking at sea has a charm peculiar to itself: even through the sickness, the jolting, the smells, and all the miseries of a steamer, there is a freshness in the dancing wave that to me pays for it all. You hear sounds of horror; your boots are not where you put them when you went to bed, and your carpet-bag and hat-box have walked as nearly as possible to the door of your cabin; you share the dressing-room of an asthmatic gentleman, who is groaning and creaking above you: you hear cups and saucers rattling, and feel most unpleasantly convinced that you have no appetite for breakfast; you are aware of the miseries to be gone through before you can even appear upon deck; that shaving is an impossibility, and dressing a series of gymnastics;

all your habits, cleanly, comfortable, and coddling, are thoroughly broken through and set aside; yet only open one half inch of the port-hole of your cabin, and when you see the green wave dashing up in the sunshine, and flinging its spray playfully into your face, when you feel the salt breeze cooling while it braces your aching brow, and perhaps catch a glimpse of the white wing of a sea-gull, as he dips into the glancing water, you will confess that there is an additional pleasure in life that you knew not of; and the wish to be on deck, and to inhale the pure and freshening breeze, will become a longing that can only be satisfied by enjoyment.

So it was with me, as I dived and tumbled about my cabin, collecting the necessary articles of dress, unblacked boots, unbrushed clothes, tumbled neckcloth, &c., &c. Beeswing, like the immortal Major Monsoon, preferred making out the first twenty-four hours of squeamishness in bed, and beguiling the lingering hours with hot brandy-and-water; but King Cob, who must have been possessed of the real *pectus robur et æs triplex* of Horace, and who knew not the meaning of sickness or indisposition, by land or sea, was already bust-

ling about the ship, talking to the passengers, hurrying the steward, and promoting the speedy arrival of breakfast by all the means in his power. Him I joined, envying his rosy countenance and sparkling eye, as with trembling limbs and tottering steps I came to anchor on a green settee, and began to "derive great benefit from the sea air."

The voyage altogether was certainly "good fun." Every one knows the eastern coast of Britain too well to have patience with a description of it; but there is a deal of beauty and wildness: witness the cliffs about Flamborough Head, along that sea-board of the German Ocean; and when we got over our little squeamishness, found our appetites, and began to appreciate the merits of bottled porter and hot whiskey toddy, there was much to amuse, if not to interest us. The perpetual eating and drinking, under the especial auspices of King Cob (I must once for all apologize for distinguishing my worthy friend only by his *nom-de-guerre*), assisted by the "meenister," astonished my weak mind more than anything. Not only did we breakfast at half-past eight, lunch at half-past twelve, dine at half-past three, drink tea at half-past six,

and sup at half-past nine; but a grill was always forthcoming, if necessary, about eleven; and it appeared as if the sickness which pervaded the greater part of the ship between decks was merely a necessary effort of Nature to counteract the perpetual stuffing that went on in the saloon. One of our evenings, I think the first one, was peculiarly sociable; the party (for there were but few passengers, and most of them were still recumbent) consisting of Beeswing, who had just risen—time half-past ten, P.M.; the minister; a Mr. Spoony, *en route* for the Highlands with his family; King Cob, concocting "a devil;" and myself. A short cross sea was just getting up, and the steamer expostulating, as steamers do, with the most heart-rending sobs and groans, and an occasional lurch, that made one seize one's tumbler and burn one's fingers involuntarily. The minister was drinking "hot stopping," made particularly "stiff," and we were talking mesmerism, clairvoyance, law, physic, and divinity; in short, whatever came uppermost.

"You must allow," said Beeswing, who was deep in magnetism, and a great stickler for the influence, "that there is an affinity between every two human beings, even between every

two living animals, that can only be accounted for upon this principle. If I yawn, you yawn (I see nothing to laugh at, Cob!). If you grant me this, you must allow that there is a certain sympathy irrespective of the will of either, between any two given individuals. This is the point I start from; and I conceive everything apparently incredible, which we hear as an operation of magnetism, is simply a modification, or rather a continuation, of this principle—your second sight, sir, in the Highlands, on which I doubt not you place implicit reliance."

"No, sir; no," said the worthy divine: "I can *not* just say I am in my ain self convinced of that faculty as desairving of credence. There was an auld wife in my parish of Auchnakilty, west of Strath-bonnart, that was fain to mak' me believe she was possessed of shupernatural powers; but whesky, sir, whesky was at the bottom o't; and since the breaking up and destruction of the sma' stills, sir, over the greater pairt of the Hielands, I have observed that the second sight has declined in a manner proportionately; tho' it is not for me, sir, to give an opeenion as to the causes thereof."

"Bravo, doctor!" said Mr. Spoony, who,

like myself, had never been over the Border, and whose clerical neighbour might be a dean or a bishop for aught he knew; "but I am sorry to hear that the 'still' trade is so far on the decline. I was in hopes that we were not to be much troubled with law beyond the Highland line, and I have been particular to take some shooting in Aberdeenshire, as being a good deal to the north of the Tay, which I take to be the line of demarcation between the Highlands and the Lowlands."

"For the maitter o' that, sir," said the minister, "ye will find there are lowlands in Aberdeenshire as well as in Fife; though when ye get up Dee-side, towards the Castleton of Braemar, ye find yerself surrounded by an awfu' hash of hills; and I'm told the muir-fowl are uncommon rife about Ballater, tho' being no sportsman myself, sir, I cannot just take upon me to say; but as for law, sir, we hae mair lawyers, aye, and keen skilful men they air, baith in Edinbro' and Aiberdeen, than we can find work for them to do. The Scottish bar, sir, stands high in the profession; and I am myself acquent with an instance whaur the skeelful defence of a counsel, though it failed to convince the jury, was powerful enough to

impress upon the mind of the prisoner that he could *not* have committed the crime for which he was tried, and which he had himself confessed, and that he was about to suffer on an unjust and one-sided verdict."

"Clever lawyer that, sir," said Cob, who had just ordered a grill; "I should like to hear the particulars."

"Weel, sir," said the reverend, "it was an aggravated case of murder; and the prisoner, a man of middle age, had himself pleaded guilty to the charge. Mr. Hepburn, now Lord Cockermouth, a lord of session, ye will understand, defended the panel, as we tairm it; and he made sic an awfu' powerful and persuasive speech, demolishing the evidence for the prosecution piecemeal, and holding up his client to be sic an honest, douce, meek, and mercifu' man, that the prisoner himself behoved to weep and take on till he was satisfied it was *not* possible that he could have committed the crime they charged him with; and who was more surprised than he, when the jury, who, providentially for the ends of justice, were a dour plain-dealing set of men, found him 'guilty,' and he was condemned accordingly to be hanged by the neck on the 28th of the

month; while Mr. Hepburn set down to prepare for his next case, like a man who had performed his duty with credit to himself, and satisfaction to all concerned. Weel, the puir creature, as he was removed from the dock, passed close to where his counsel was seated, and says he, 'I'm dooting, Mr. Hepburn, that a' didna get justice the day?' 'No,' says Mr. Hepburn, as he lookit up from his papers, 'no, but ye'll get it on the 28th.' It was uncommonly neat, sir," was the divine's concluding remark, as he finished his story and his tumbler—an opinion in which all except Mr. Spooney, who was asleep, cordially joined. The powers of speech and redundancy of anecdote being slightly fostered by the strength of his potations, and the *vires acquirit eundo* principle being most true in conversation, he went on to relate to us another anecdote connected with this distinguished lawyer.

"Lord Cockermouth was as good in cross-examining of witnesses as in every other pairt of his profession. I was in court upon one occasion when his Lordship's colleague was endeavouring to prove the general ignorance and stupidity of a particular individual, in a case connected with the lease of a farm, thro'

the evidence of the witness, a hard-headed Lowland farmer, and intimate friend of the individual whose want of general intelligence it was advisable to establish. 'Well, my good man,' began the cross-examining counsel, 'how long have you known Mr. Mac-Tod?' 'Oo' a've been acquent wi' him may be fifty year.' 'Do you consider him an intelligent man?" 'What's your wull?' 'I say, do you consider him a well-informed man, and one capable of understanding or arranging a difficult matter to his own advantage?' 'A dinna ken.' 'Well, but do you think he is a man of general capacity?' 'A could not say.' 'What I mean is this, my good man: you have known Mr. Mac-Tod for several years, should you say now that he was what you would call an intellectual man?' ''Am no just clear that 'am understanding what y'ere sayin, sir.' 'Allow me,' said Mr. Hepburn to his brother lawyer, 'allow me to try what I can do with this witness;' and accordingly with a good-humoured air and much in his own dialect, he began—'Are ye weel acquent wi' Archie Mac-Tod?' 'Aye, am I; 'am weel acquent wi' him.' 'How lang is't since ye first became acquent wi' him?' 'Hoot! 'ave kent him

syne we were bairns at the schule thegither.' 'Is there anything intill him?' 'Hoot! there's just naething at a' intill him but what he puts in wi' the spune.' The evidence was conclusive as to the capacity of Mr. Mac-Tod, and the case progressed accordingly."

We very much applauded the worthy minister at the conclusion of this last story, and were getting on so comfortably under the joint influence of supper, toddy, and small talk, that we never remarked the wind had freshened, and consequently the swell increased, till our attention was attracted to the uncomfortable fact by a wail from the ladies' cabin, and a faint soprano, which whispered "Stewardess!" crescendo, "Stewardess!!" "Yes, mam." "A little more"—I did not quite catch the end of the sentence; but by the tinkling of a tea-spoon and the apparent necessity of hot water, it was probably some cordial which had before proved beneficial. It seemed to have succeeded in this instance; for the same voice, apparently much refreshed, was again heard to articulate, "Stewardess, whereabouts are we now?" a question I recollected to have heard at short intervals ever since we left the Nore. "Just getting into 'the Deeps,' mam, at the

mouth of the Humber," was the alarming reply. "The deeps! oh, good gracious!" "The deeps—how dreadful!" "Stewardess, ask the captain if there is much danger." "Frightful—the deeps!"—in every key, from matron's bass to maiden's treble, amongst which I recognised the baritone of an ancient Swiss governess, the only lady who had that day appeared at dinner; but who, I have reason to fear, suffered for it afterwards. The stewardess, who eventually obtained the office of matron in a lunatic asylum by way of retiring into an easier situation, was most assiduous in her praiseworthy endeavours to calm the terrors of her lady passengers, and amongst other comforting and imaginative remarks, assured them that the captain said the wind would be sure to go down at twelve o'clock—a promise which appeared to afford the greatest consolation, and which I gave her the more credit for inventing, as it then wanted just five minutes of midnight, and the skipper himself had for the last two hours taken advantage of the comparatively favourable weather, by what sailors call "caulking it," on one of the saloon sofas.

I was in the act of retiring for the night,

when Mr. Spooney, who had been comfortably asleep in his chair, was summoned to attend upon his *sposa*. As I believe he might not venture beyond the door of the ladies' cabin, and consequently the whole of his conversation must have been carried on while standing sentry outside, I did not envy him when I woke some two hours afterwards, and heard him tumbling about for a light, and rolling backwards and forwards to his cabin, he having been then only just dismissed upon the repeated assurance that the ship was not gone overboard, and that there was no apparent likelihood of destruction before dawn on the morrow.

The following day nearly all had recovered their health and good humour, and the voyage proceeded with its usual routine of pacing the deck, smoking (in the forecastle), eating, drinking, arguing, and sleeping, varied only by the amusement we derived from the self-devotion of a Highland piper, returning with his chief to his native hills, and who persevered, in defiance of the most violent sea-sickness, in playing the pibroch which had marshalled his feudal superior to dinner for years, and which the faithful retainer, notwithstanding many in-

terruptions, persisted in completing. It was, too, ludicrous to see the swelling gait and turkey-cock appearance so necessary to enhance a solo upon that national instrument, exchanged for the pale dejected looks of a vassal doing homage unto Neptune, exacted every five minutes, and always at the moment when the "gathering air," getting faster and fiercer, seemed to imply that scores of kilted warriors were tramping their "quick step" to the notes of the sickening minstrel. Notwithstanding all these little events, the whole thing began to get tedious long before we arrived, and I believe it would be difficult to say which of us was most delighted when, steaming up one of those noble estuaries that embellish the N.E. coast of Scotland, we arrived at our place of disembarkation, men, dogs, and guns, all in good order, and tolerably ready for work.

Little time did we put off in seeing curiosities or visiting lions, whilst completing the few arrangements necessary before our fresh departure for "our lodge." Our lodge—what a wild-sounding name, and at the same time what ideas of snugness and comfort suggest themselves at the word! Every squire can have a shooting-box; and it calls to your mind

nothing but dust, turnips, partridges, and an occasional hen-pheasant. But a lodge! an Indian warrior has his lodge; and when we talk of it in connection with Glen-anything, we involuntarily associate the idea with grouse, black game, *the chance* of a red-deer at least, peat, mountain dew, and the glorious air of the hills. Impatient were we to get there; never were cartridges, fishing-tackle, and two or three plaids, bought in such a hurry; and scarcely could we refrain from a school-boy's "huzza!" when, late on a glorious summer evening, just about crimson sunset, we came to the front view of our future Highland home. There it lay, white and clean, about a mile from us; a loch—or rather lochy, for it was of the smallest dimensions—within twenty yards of the door; a few birch trees on a green knoll behind it, enabling your eye to form some idea of the mighty mountain at its back; and a small plot of corn covering about two acres, flanked by a dusky peat-stack, and enclosed by a low stone-wall. It got darker and darker as we approached, and we saw but little of our future haunts before bed-time. Everything was arranged in anticipation of our arrival; and when we had inspected kennels,

sleeping rooms, &c., &c., we were glad enough to betake ourselves to bed. The last thing I did was to open my window, and gaze into the darkness, trying to picture to myself the outline that would greet my waking eyesight in the morning, and fancying that even then it was possible there might be a wandering red-deer within point blank distance of my dressing-case.

CHAPTER II.

"It's up Glenbarchan's braes I gaed,
And o'er the bent of Kittle-braid,
An' mony a weary cast I made
To cuittle the muir-fowl's tail.
If up a bonny black-cock should spring,
To whistle him down wi' a slug in his wing,
And strap him on to my lunzie-string,
Right seldom would I fail."

GLORIOUS to the emancipated Londoner is the waking on the 12th of August. Tried friends, good dogs, and guns that mock at distance, a well-preserved moor, a picturesque country, and, above all, that Highland air which acts like a cordial upon the frame and spirits, making a Falstaff feel as elastic as an Auriol, and inducing the pigmy that steers the winner of the Clearwell with the muscular power

and self-relying vigour of Ajax the son of Telamon.

"Beeswing, are you getting up? breakfast is ordered at seven. Bravo, Cob! the monarch has actually thrown his royal line over the glassy surface of Loch Cleinich, and already the merry trouts, small, sweet, and ruddy, are fulfilling their destinies in the frying-pan. Beeswing, pray get up."

"My dear fellow, I *am* up, only I can't speak when I'm shaving. Send up Big Sandy; I must arrange about the beats for to-day, as I am the only one of the party who has ever been here before; and if I gave you your own way, *you* would be off deer-stalking, without glass, gilly, or knowledge of any kind whatever; and Cob, with his antics, would disturb the whole ground before luncheon-time, and leave all the best places half-hunted. Come in, Sandy."

Enter Sandy, or Big Sandy as he was usually called—as fine a specimen of a hill-man as you shall see between Strathearn and John-o'-Groat's; tall, muscular, square shouldered, and clean made, he would have stood for the portrait of a catheran as well as any proscribed M'Gregor of them all; but Sandy,

honest man, was a quiet, decent, kirk-going fellow, who never harmed man or beast in his life beyond the roving hawk or other vermin he trapped so successfully, and whose only weaknesses, if weaknesses they might be called, were a wonderful inclination for tobacco in all its branches, and a slight tendency to take the other sup of the whisky which marks the line between decidedly drunk and provisionally sober.

"Well, Sandy, it's to be a fine day; the mist is clearing, and it seems to be coming down from the tops, which is always a good sign. We ought to get a good bag to-day, from what you told us last night about the birds."

"Oh, yes, ye will get a fine bag the day; and I am thinking it will hold to be a fine day. Yes—there is a good sprinkling of birds in Glen Mivart, and there are many more broods than I remember to have seen amongst the tops into Craig Altyre, and," added Sandy, with a considerate glance at me, "if Mr. Nogo was to take the lower beat of the Moss of Struanach it would not be that steep walking for him, and he would have a fine chance for a

blackcock in the corrie where we louse the dogs."

"That's all right, Beeswing—heavens! how I should like to kill a blackcock! Next to a red-deer, I think I had rather whistle down a fine old blackcock than anything on the face of the earth."

"Well, you can take that beat if you like; you and the King might shoot together, as there ought to be work for two guns, and have Sandy with you; and I will take the upper part of Struanach and the tops beyond the big moss, and take the English keeper with me, as I know the ground. But I hope Cob will not be offended at my requesting his jager to take off those light yellow gaiters, which I fear will much impede his action 'up the hill.' Well, then, that is settled; so now for breakfast."

And to breakfast we accordingly did ample justice, not without a due vote of thanks to the angler for the first course of our voluminous repast.

As I lit my cigar and lounged over the window of our dining-parlour previous to starting, I thought to myself that hardly even

the pencil of Landseer or Frank Grant could have done justice to the scene before me. Imagine a loch of about a mile in length by a third of that distance in breadth, sleeping calmly in the shadow of a glorious black-looking mountain, whose august head was still shrouded in the mist, and whose height, left to the imagination, appeared immeasurable; the ripple on the nearer shore was all that caught the gleam of the morning sun, but a cultivated strath to my left was bathed in his golden light; the corn was yellowing in patches, and the trees which studded its surface lost nothing of their effect from their stunted growth in such gigantic scenery, where the oaks of Royal Windsor itself would have been but as pigmies in the embrace of that mountain-pass. To my right, hill was heaped upon hill in magnificent confusion; each gaudy tint and variety of light and shade at length resolving itself into that indescribable greyish-blue of a distance that seemed to melt into the summer sky. In the foreground—and here Grant would have been in ecstasies and Landseer in his element—two shaggy ponies, accoutred with panniers, and loaded with plaids, spare ammunition, luncheon, and

all other necessaries, held by two heather-legged gillies (alas! not kilted), and an ancient shepherd in a plaid, and lowland bonnet, lighting his morning pipe. Sandy was still consulting with Beeswing in the lodge, but six handsome pointers and a venerable retriever were scattered over the greensward; and Mop, the roughest and most insinuating terrier that ever sat on end and begged for biscuit, couching lion-like across the door, with his head between his paws, completed the detail of this Highland picture.

But out comes Cob, in *the shortest* trousers tied at the knees for getting "up the hill"—an operation he never performs without much lamentation, sobbing, and sighing, and many a halt and face-about to enjoy the scenery. Out he comes, shouldering a long double-barrelled *chef-d'œuvre* of the house of Lancaster, and woe to the wing that shows itself above the heather within distance of those deadly tubes. A better shot, a keener sportsman, or a jollier companion never walked. Out he comes, his good-humoured face lighted up with merriment, his jolly sides shaking from the effects of a repartee with which he has just favoured Beeswing; and with a joke for the gillies and

pat for the dogs, he begins to describe to me the intricacies of the path by which we are to arrive at our beat, and having persuaded me that walking is by far the safest way of getting there, proceeds deliberately to mount the pony, and make himself agreeable from the saddle whilst I trudge by his side. In this form we journeyed about a couple of miles, till a turn in the path brought us in view of a mountain stream, stealing down the most sheltered of corries and terminating in the most picturesque of waterfalls. Here Sandy, who had preserved an unbroken silence for the last half-hour, suggested that we should "louse the dogs," as he called it; and forthwith he set at liberty two as handsome pointers as you would wish to shoot over, rejoicing in the names of Port and Kedger, whilst we anxious sportsmen proceeded to load, shoulder, and prepare for action.

Away they go, forty mile an hour, up the hill-side, as if they meant to put its brow between themselves and all restraint; back again, down to the very burn that washes the corrie, to and fro they range; they can go like foxhounds, and yet how perfectly they are under control! I do like to see the dash of

two very high-bred pointers who have not been shot over in a low country, and whose range has never been broken by the "ware fence" discipline so necessary for partridge-shooting. But look, Kedger is down, perfect the attitude, but wanting the eager straining look of a dog when game is close before him, as I find to my cost after striding breathlessly up to him. He is only backing, but Cob points towards the fern which is growing rank and high some two hundred yards below me, and down I go again, cocking both barrels and shaking with excitement. It is Port who has got them, and the game must be close before him. What a moment! but no, his stern moves, and on he crawls, down upon his belly like a stalker as he is; his stern stiffens, but still he moves on, putting one foot before the other like a cat, and as noiselessly as the gossamer that floats above him. Again he stops, and this time his stern is like a bar of iron, and the whole dog is endued with that indescribable, and to me I confess somewhat ludicrous appearance, which distinguishes the pointer when close upon his game. I steal a look at Cob, who replies with a wink. That instant up they get; whir! whir! flap! flap! flap! a brood of black-

game, accompanied by their venerable mother, the old grey hen. Cob probably never moved a muscle; I fired both barrels; alas! the matronly bird fell a victim to my second shot: "down charge" went Port, licking his lips, and down went Kedger a long way above us, with his head in the air; Sandy merely remarked, "There is mair grey-fowl before the dogs;" and it was not till I had loaded and put my caps on, that I bethought me of my iniquity. Black-game before the 19th, and to slay the old grey-hen! Well, never mind, it was Sandy's fault for bringing me here and promising me the chance of a blackcock, which Cob, after he had enjoyed his laugh, told me the honest fellow invariably did with a neophyte. The fact is, he was not very particular about times and seasons himself, and he had so often remarked the keenness about black-game peculiar to beginners, that he brought them here to shoot one as a "bonne-bouche" out of pure civility. "No fines here," said Cob; and as he spoke, cock! cock! cock! whirr! up got an old cock grouse behind him, laughing, as it would seem, prematurely at his anticipated escape. Kedger had passed over him, but my partner's gun was up in an instant, and whack

he came, a plumper, rebounding from the heather with the force of his downfall; a fine old bird he was, wonderfully black for the time of year, and his beak like iron. We voted him a patriarch of the hills, and decided to send him away in the boxes—not to eat him. This was the first grouse I had seen killed, so no wonder I examined him minutely, "Hold up, good dogs; how hot the sun is! but we shall get a breeze when we have got over this 'face:'" and "on we goes again."

* * * *

A delightful morning's shooting we had. I was pretty successful for an inferior shot, and my partner as deadly as usual. The fact is, grouse-shooting early in the season is highly complimentary to one's prowess; the birds are a good size, and consequently a fairish mark; they generally get up at about the right distance, and there are no hedges, trees, or people at work to make it necessary to rap them down at any particular moment; the consequence is, that a slow poking shot may fill his bag with great certainty and satisfaction. But wait till brown October closes his mellow career, when the oak coppice is red and tan-coloured, and the heads of Ben Cruachan,

Ben Mohr, or Ben Wyvis are whitening with snow; then the old cocks skim whirring away, two feet above the heather, and fifty yards from the gun at the nearest, whilst the bare and exposed places are covered with the game in packs that never wait to be looked at. True must be his eye, and quickly must he pitch his gun and shoot, that would walk home triumphant with his eight or ten brace at this period of the year; and more enjoyment has he for his toil in bagging that gallant few, than if he had slaughtered hecatombs on the 12th, or depopulated the preserves of the whole county of Norfolk.

Toiling over all sorts of ground under an August sun is doubtless as exhausting to the inward man as it is fatiguing to the outward one. We had settled to meet at luncheon, when, according to a time-honoured custom, one hour was always devoted to refreshment, repose, and the sedative of "sublime tobacco." Beeswing's ground lay so that the extremity of his beat was close upon the spring where we had arranged to lunch. And as, enveloped in our plaids, we threw ourselves upon the heather in all the enjoyment of rest after labour (the poor man's luxury, entailing no regrets and

burdened with no tax), we heard a shot fired a little way from us, and ere we had unpacked our eatables, Beeswing made his appearance, evidently ready to take his share of whatever was going on.

"Well, old fellow, what have you done?"

"Thirteen brace and a-half, one snipe, and one rabbit. And you?"

"We have had a capital morning's sport, and have not been over the best of our ground yet; twenty-one brace of grouse, five hares, and a grey-hen. Nogo shot uncommonly well, so that the grey-hen hadn't a chance."

"It was my first appearance," I modestly suggested, "and I could not be expected to be steady from riot."

"Never mind," said Beeswing, alluding to an old story of poor Goosey, when 'a gent' rode on to one of his hounds and killed him; "it's a poor concern that can't afford one a-day. Put the whisky-flask into the spring to cool. Sandy, get me a game-bag to sit upon. Now then, caterer Cob, what have you provided for luncheon?"

I have been at many a mid-day feast, wedding-breakfasts, *déjeûners*, pic-nics, and all; but never did I enjoy anything so much

as our simple meal by that mountain spring; the water was like crystal, and tasted positively sweet; and after nature was satisfied, it was too luxurious to smoke recumbent, gazing with half-shut eyes upon one of the fairest scenes in bonny Scotland.

"Sandy, what is the name of this spring?"

Sandy's respectful reply I cannot put into orthography, for the Gaelic word was unattainable by my Saxon ear; but it signified, as he condescended to translate it, The spring of the corrie of the Glen of the Fairies.

"Yes, that is just the meaning of it in English—The spring of the corrie of the Glen of the Fairies:" and truly it was worthy of the Elfin land. Beeswing, who is a Gaelic scholar and sort of poet to boot, volunteered us a metrical version of the tradition which gave to the glen its fairy title. He wanted to tell it us first in Gaelic, but I think even he was abashed at the idea of Sandy's criticisms on his pronunciation, and as I remarked to him that the original would not benefit either of *us* very much, he accordingly tipped us his own doggrel, as King Cob expressed it, in the following words:—

THE FAIRIES' SPRING.

They have stolen the child from his father's hand,
He is gone from his mother's knee ;
They have borne him away to the Fairy-land,
To ride in the van of their elfin-band,
For a babe of the Cross was he.
Kind father, meek mother, ye seek him in vain ;
You never shall look on your darling again.

To the mountain side, where the flowers grew wild,
He would wander forth to play ;
And the fairies had seen that winsome child,
With his golden curls and blue eyes mild,
And his simple childish way.
And the Elf-king met him : " Come hither," said he,
" Come ride to the land of the fairies with me."

He thought not once of his mother's woe—
He forget his father's home ;
For they gave him a steed like the driven snow,
And he smiled as they led him down below,
Through the middle of earth to roam.
And they showed him their treasures of jewels and gold,
And they welcomed the boy, for they loved him of old.

But the child soon pined for his mother's care,
And he pined for the light of day ;
He pined for the freshening mountain air,
And his blue eyes ached with the dazzling glare
Of their cavern's magic ray.
For the sign of the Cross had been pressed on his brow,
And he might not be thrall to the fairy-folk now.

But few that have lived with the elfin race
May revisit earth again ;
No more shall he smile in his mother's face,
For his spirit has flown to its heavenly place—
With the fairies it could not remain ;
Though deeply they loved him, and hopeless and wild
Was the elfin's grief for the Christian child.

They buried him down in a cavern lone,
Deep, deep in the mountain's womb :
And their tears welled up through the hard grey stone
To the earth above, as they made their moan
O'er the infant's early tomb.
And sweet to the thirsting lips of men
Is the Spring of Tears in the Fairies' Glen.

"I believe it to be an invention of your own, Beeswing."

"You shall have Sandy's version in Gaelic if you are incredulous; but we must be on the moor again; so fill powder-horns and shot-pouches, out with the two young dogs, and '*en avant, messieurs;*' but first, one small libation of the pure dew of the mountain; it will taste like 'liqueur' after cooling in that icy spring."

"How we shall walk after it!"

"Nunc est bibendum, nunc pede libero
Pulsanda tellus."

"Sandy, your health."

"Here is better sport still, gentlemen."

And the young dogs being uncoupled, my partner and I are again on foot and bent upon destruction—somewhat stiff 'tis true, but much invigorated in body and mind by our repast.

We toiled on, as is usual in shooting, some part of the day, for two hours or so, with but indifferent success; and here, I may remark, how often I have heard surmises as to the whereabouts of grouse during a portion of the day. You shall go on a moor, where on the 11th your keeper found a brood in every moss-hag, and you shall find that at one period or another of your day's sport, generally during the early part of the afternoon, you keep stamping on over every description of ground without firing a shot, till surprise fades into disappointment, and disappointment degenerates into disgust. You are presently rewarded, when the birds begin to feed, by coming in upon them in multitudes; but where they get to during the "dark hour"—whether they retire to dress for dinner, or what becomes of them—passes our knowledge of the craft altogether. So it was with us. Two mortal hours had we of this pursuit of moor-fowl

under difficulties, varied certainly by one brood getting up considerably out of shot, and the consequent committal and punishment of one of the young dogs, who, tired of snuffling all over the hill-side without finding, testified his joy at the presence of game by pursuing them open-mouthed, and putting up another brace who might have sat till now but for his exertions. This glaring offence having been properly taken notice of, Sandy called my attention to a deep zig-zag mark upon the heather about eight or ten yards long, and terminating as abruptly as it commenced; a large rock, apparently split, lay midway, and this he informed me was the work of lightning in the previous week; there was something awful in the visible handiwork of the destroyer thus traced upon nature's boldest features; the brow of the mountain thus seared and riven by the thunderbolt called up an idea of its immeasurable force verging upon the supernatural. Everything is now accounted for upon scientific principles, and it is quite right that it should be so, and that the human mind should know and understand its power over the very elements. We have tamed the lightning on our wires as we have bound the giant steam upon our railways;

we have made the one a porter and the other a postman. Yet for all that, there is something to me in a thunderstorm beyond a mere chemical combination of certain fluids; and the child who cowers in holy awe at that voice from heaven has more of my sympathies than the sagacious "Franklin" flying his kite into the thunder-cloud, and drawing off from its lightning-charged batteries whatever quantity of the electric fluid he required for present use.

These remarks I did not make to Sandy, who would not have understood them, or to King Cob, who would have laughed at them; so I kept them to myself, and my meditations were soon disturbed by the improvement which showed itself in our sport. The sun was getting low, and the birds were on the move as feeding-time approached. "Bang, bang!" "Down charge!" "To-ho!" and the rest of it, was now the order of the day; and we picked up a capital bag by the time we got to the end of our ground. The last moss we shot was full of hags, and impossible to be traversed by a pony, or indeed by any animal but a tolerably active pedestrian; the moss or bog being very soft and treacherous, and the little knolls

of sound ground—*Scotticè*, "hags"—being at that exact distance apart which tempted the ambitious sportsman to a leap, not always a successful one. Here, though nearly dark, we got some capital shooting; and when we turned out our bag on the track where we met the pony, and which was the conclusion of our beat, Hesperus, or whatever the star was that had just made its appearance, twinkled down upon forty-five brace of grouse, seven hares, a couple and a-half of snipe, one teal, and my grey-hen. Six mountain-miles had we to trudge home in the dark, and no pony to ride, this time; but, after such a day's sport, who would feel beat? And then the relief of getting upon a road, no matter what sort of one, after moiling all day up and down hill, working back, shoulders, loins, and lungs, is *faute de mieux* the next thing to an arm-chair; so we lit our cigars, and steamed away merrily, beguiling the distance with many a pleasant jest and oft-told tale.

"Ye will see where there is a grey rock above yon knowe, *wast* of the birches—no, ye will not see the grey rock, but ye will see a bare place in the heather. Aweel," began Sandy, between the puffs of the shortest and

blackest of cutty-pipes, which seemed to grow to his teeth; and forthwith he related to us a plaintive tale, which, tragical as was its termination, was somewhat spoiled in the sentiment to his hearers by the language in which it was couched, being translated into the "other tongue," as Sandy called it, out of the metaphorical dialect of Ossian; but the substance of his story was melancholy enough. It appears that when Sandy was a "bit laddie," as he called it, there were two brothers of the name of Connell living in the Glen: stout, active hill-men were they both, and employed in looking after the game, destroying the vermin, and keeping down the rabbits. John—or "Dark John," as they called him—the eldest, was a wild, headstrong, good-humoured fellow, with but little of the proverbial caution of his nation, and a tendency to fun and frolic, of which even an Irishman need not have been ashamed. There was not his equal in the Strath at putting the stone, tossing the "caber," dancing the Highland fling, and all the other accomplishments of a mountaineer; whilst Angus, the younger one, was of a more reflective turn of mind, and delighted in passing his hours alone upon the hill, or wandering

by the loch. He was supposed to know most concerning the habits of deer, to be the wariest stalker, and the best fisherman of all the inhabitants of the Strath; and a good-looking, quiet lad he was, with a degree of determination and pluck concealed beneath his mild exterior that a stranger would hardly have given him credit for. In fact, Sandy, who knew them both, was of opinion that, where "heart," as he called it, was wanted—signifying courage—Angus was more "to lippen to" (*Anglicè*, to be depended on) than his boisterous brother. The fair sex were not so very plentiful in the glen, and most of the specimens were somewhat tough, smoke-dried, and stricken in years; but Agnes, the daughter of old Peter Cameron, the publican, needed not such foils as the ancient crones about her to be reckoned the flower of the whole countryside. At kirk and market Agnes was the acknowledged beauty, and as good as she was bonny. Many a lad, both up and down the glen, was sighing for Agnes; but she never so much as looked over her shoulder at one of them: and although a lassie that knew her most intimately affirmed, as she told Sandy, that dark John Connell was the fortunate

suitor, it was certain that no one had ever seen her bestow the slightest mark of her favour on the jovial forester, nor had that worthy himself ever been heard to boast that Agnes would come to his whistle, as he called it—a note which, by his own account, caused half the lasses in broad Scotland to come trooping over moss and heather in his wake. Nevertheless, Dark John was the man; and in vain did the gentle Angus, whose heart had been long given to this mountain-daisy, woo and strive to win her in his homely way. Who can explain the wayward causes of a woman's fancy? John, who was not much given to the softer emotions, liked the lass well enough, as he himself said, and it is certain that he respected her more than the rest of her sex; but as for the sort of passionate love which she had conceived for him, and which poor Angus suffered for her, he had it not to give. Things went on in this way, somewhat after the fashion of Stone's popular picture of "Cross Purposes," till poor Angus, wearied with his unsuccessful suit, heart-sick and desolate, determined to "take the shilling," and strive to forget his love and his native glens in the columns of the gallant —th Highlanders, then quartered in a town

some thirty miles over the hills from his abode. It was during the heat of the war; and there was no fear of a stalwart, clean-limbed youth like poor Angus being refused. Everything was settled for his departure; and one fine morning in October, the embryo soldier started off on his career, accompanied by his brother, to see him over the first few miles of his journey. They were the best of friends, those two; not even the affection borne by the one for her who loved the other, had been able to sow dissension between the brothers; and often had the elder, in his rough, good-humoured way, endeavoured to dissuade Angus from his purpose of enlisting. They started, accordingly, like true Highlanders, "shoulder to shoulder"—Angus more cheerful than he had been for months, and John, with his gun poised on his broad shoulder, and his brother's bundle in his hand, careless, merry, and swaggering as usual. Sandy saw them as they passed his bothy. Alas! he never saw either of them again alive. The following morning, he went through the knoll of birches he had pointed out to me, to look at his traps; and his attention was arrested by some hoodie-

crows circling and wheeling in the air over an object in the heather some distance a-head of him. He walked on, thinking it might be a dead sheep, or some stricken stag who had staggered there from the forest with his death-wound. Imagine how his blood curdled when he came upon the body of Dark John lying stiff and stark, with his gun by his side! The whole charge had passed through his broad chest, in a wound you might have put your hand in, and he had been dead several hours. Sandy carried him on his back to his father's house; and as an over-ruling Providence willed it, the first person he met was Agnes Cameron, as he toiled down the path with his ghastly burden. Often has he prayed that never again might he hear such a scream as burst from that poor girl's throat. It was too much for a woman to bear; and when at length Sandy succeeded in getting some assistance, they carried her home a raving maniac. With the wildest gestures, she denounced Angus as the murderer of his brother—"her John, Dark John, the loved of her heart." She would share his grave—was he not her own? And then, with bursts of fearful laughter, she spoke

of him as still alive, merry, and dancing at their wedding; and called to her father, and the minister, and her neighbours, to see how happy she was. Happy, poor girl! before another autumn shed its leaves, she was at rest in her grave; and many an eye was wet, and many a cheek pale, amongst the kind-hearted mountaineers who bore her to her last home. Many were the different opinions in the glen as to the cause of poor John Connell's death; but he who could alone have cleared it up was drowned some two months afterwards, in embarking for foreign service; and the simple and primitive inhabitants of the glen had no means of knowing whether Angus had ever been made aware of his brother's death, or whether he knew too well that brother's fate, and sank into the ocean stained with a brother's blood. I must say for Sandy that he put the more charitable construction upon the facts, and seemed to look upon the catastrophe as an accident that must have happened after the brothers had parted—as it proved, for ever.

Ere the story was concluded, we were long past the spot that Sandy had first pointed out

to us; and before we had done discussing the details of the tragedy, the lights were twinkling in the lodge in front of us; and thus ended my first day's sport in the Highlands of Scotland.

CHAPTER III.

" Bold Robin Hood was a forester good,
As ever drew bow in a merry green wood,
And the wild deer we'll follow, we'll follow,
The wild deer we'll follow."

Old English Glee.

" Then let the stricken deer go weep,
The hart ungalled play,
For some must watch while others sleep ;
Thus wags the world away."

SHAKSPERE.

" I CAN'T see them, Beeswing. How many are there ? "

" You are looking a mile too far ; carry your eye over the burn ; have you got the upright stone above that bare place ? now then, a little to the right of that."

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Following these directions with a hand not over steady, I caught a glimpse of a moving object in the field of my "Dolland," and then after dancing the horizon up and down in my glass a good deal, I got fairly steadied on the objects I wished to study; two, three, all stags; another getting up, a hind evidently; and moving the prospect a little further to the right, I made out two or three more of the weaker sex, apparently somewhat restless, and feeding only at intervals, one head out of the lot being always in the air. I turned to Beeswing, eager to be at them; but to my surprise, and somewhat to my disgust, he had calmly sat down upon the heather with his glass shut up, and the air of a man who did not mean moving yet awhile at all events. I looked at the forester who that day was to be the guide of my destiny. He was quietly lighting his pipe with his back to us, and appeared to concentrate all his energies on that soothing task.

"Well," I said, rather impatiently, "why can't we get at these fellows? they are not very far, and nothing can be easier than to get into that broken ground and stalk them."

"*Festinâ lente*, my good fellow?" was Beeswing's sagacious reply; "those hinds are very

restless; I fancy there must be more deer that we cannot see that have the wind of us; *they* have probably moved, and our friends opposite can see them. Now, M'Cormick, who is, as you say, a man of few words, when he has finished his pipe will crawl forward to yonder brow, whence he will get what he calls a fine view down the glen, and when he comes back we shall know better what to do. In the mean time we are as well here as anywhere, and if you like to smoke you may puff away with a good conscience and this consolatory reflection, that if the deer can wind the tobacco they can wind you, and the latter odour is the most likely to disturb them of the two."

Whilst James M'Cormick, the forester, is crawling to the brow aforesaid and ruminating there upon his stomach, I will explain how an humble individual like myself came to be enjoying the princely sport of deer-stalking in one of the finest forests in Scotland.

One Sunday, early in September, we had attended our parish church as usual—an excellent habit, which except from stress of weather we never broke through, although the distance was an honest seven miles from the lodge. Coming out of the kirk we met a

more. Here the same natural dog-vane was again made use of, but this time the blossoms floated the wrong way, and we were accordingly led in the same cautious manner right up an almost precipitous ascent at the same pace as before, I should say a good five miles an hour. How blown I was! and when I had panted myself into a recovery, and addressed a polite observation to M'Cormick relative to the fineness of the weather, if I remember aright, the look of contempt with which my observation was received by the Gael effectually prevented my making any further advances towards his confidence, and I made up my mind, that come what might, unbroken silence and implicit obedience were to be the order of the day. One or two more halts only led to one or two more breathers, and I was not sorry when a cairn of stones, evidently put up for the purpose on the brow of a wide descent, and commanding an uninterrupted view of the mountain opposite, promised us a resting place. Here it was that we caught our first view of the deer before mentioned, and here we waited patiently till our oracular guide should have completed his survey and decided upon his plan of operations.

It appeared that the rest of the deer, which we thought might have winded us, were too far "wast" to have been influenced by our presence, and our friends opposite continuing to feed on most contentedly, it was decided that we should proceed to circumvent them at any rate; but there was a stag in the other parcel which M'Cormick had seen, that the chief was most anxious to get, from the peculiarity of his head: he had no antlers but the two brow ones, his horns being totally devoid of points, and, when seen sideways, like those of an antelope. The forester had recognised him in an instant, and as he was a large heavy deer it was advisable to get him. After a low conversation in Gaelic, in which Sandy was called in to council, it was arranged that James M'Cormick should take charge of Mr. Nogo and endeavour to bring him within killing distance of the original parcel, in which there were two very fine stags; whilst Beeswing, attended by the grey man and Sandy, was to do his "possible" towards bringing home the singular head which was destined to decorate the chieftain's halls. This decision having been come to, I was forcibly divested of my rifle (a double-barrel that only wanted to be held

straight like the rest of them), and after a brief farewell to Beeswing I was marched off in the custody of M'Cormick, apparently in the contrary direction to that in which my destined victims lay.

It appears to me that the pleasures of deer-stalking would be materially enhanced by some slight insight into the principles on which the sport is conducted, or, if I may so call it, into the "rules of the game." Here I was striding away after a little round-shouldered highlander, turning when he turned, crouching when he crouched, and running, leaping, crawling, and wading, like the shadow of my conductor, who all the time seemed to imply by his manner that I was the same sort of incumbrance to him that a kettle proverbially is when attached to a dog's tail; and all this without my having the slightest idea where I was going, what we were striving to do, or how all these mysterious evolutions were to bring us any nearer the object of our "chasse." I can conceive that to go out by yourself to look for deer, and then to stalk and bring down the "fattest i' the forest" by your own unaided sagacity, must be one of the greatest and most exciting of all triumphs connected with "*gun sporting*." I

do know one gentleman who is in the habit of "stalking for himself," but he is a man endued with talents that fall to the lot of few; and unequalled as he is in his profession, he is almost as distinguished in the deer forest, the hunting field, or the river. He "kens the wiles of dun deer-stalking" as well as Donald Caird himself; but I believe that to the generality of sportsmen the extremely accurate knowledge required of *every inch* of a large extent of ground is the insuperable difficulty, a knowledge seldom gained but by one who has been brought up in the forest, and hence the necessity for a leader or dry-nurse in this most popular sport. But in the mean time down goes M'Cormick as if he had been shot, with a wave of his hand much like that with which Sandy signalizes Kedger to "back," and readily as that well-drilled pointer I imitate his motions. Once he looks round, and in the face which I see under his arm, there beams forth at length something like a spark of excitement. What a catching thing that same excitement is! I feel my heart begin to beat and my hand to shake, though *my* prospect is bounded by the nail-studded soles of M'Cormick's shoes. "Doon, doon; bide you there;"

and with head bent low towards the heather, and a half-nervous inclination to laugh, I lie impatient, watching the proceedings of the artist. Carefully, warily, and cat-like, he crawls to where the heather is growing thick and bushy, some fifteen yards a-head of me. Often stops he, and stealthily creeps on to the wished-for spot; once he looks back at his charge, but though shaking with impatience I lie quiet as a mouse. Now pushing the tufts of heather aside, his body prone upon the earth, he raises his head an inch, an inch and a-half; then watches, gazing motionless, as if turned to stone. Once only I saw an involuntary motion of the hand towards the glass; but no, it would make too much noise, and they are probably so near that it is not worth while to use the telescope. Will he never come back? At length he has looked his fill, and cautiously and stealthily as before he crawls first backwards, then sideways, crab-like, but ever noiselessly to the spot where he has left me. With one finger he beckons, and I follow. Serpentlike is the advance, as before. Well might Falstaff say that "eight yards of uneven ground were three-score miles and ten" to him, for in those few yards how many ideas

came rushing through my brain! the few seconds it took to accomplish them seemed like hours. And now we reach the reconnoitring spot; and drawing me alongside of him, M'Cormick places the rifle, long since uncased, in my trembling hands, with the short and pithy injunction, "Tak time!" Words that should be written in letters of gold. My brain is in a whirl, but I have sense enough left to know I had better have a good view of them before I think of firing, and I part the heather with my hands to take my first look at a red-deer on such intimate terms. What a glorious fellow, feeding unsuspiciously, broadside on to me, and not seventy yards off! He looks as big as a cow, and much lighter in colour than I had fancied from seeing deer at a distance, and through a glass. Surely I shall not miss him. Somehow I feel cooler now, and stretch back my arm for my rifle; though I never heard the click, Sandy has given it me cocked. How silent everything is! I can hear my own breathing and my heart beating. Not another sound in the waste about me. Firmly I press the butt to my shoulder, and remembering Purdy's oft-told directions, I cover him scientifically, beginning at the knee,

and so up the fore-leg to the shoulder; but no, it will not do, the sight of my rifle is dancing up and down, now over his back, now under his belly. I fear, a hand at no time over steady, is now shaking like an aspen leaf. "Tak time!" I think of that watch-word, and determine to be deadly. I will give myself two or three minutes to recover, and remain in readiness with my rifle to my shoulder; but see, he raises his head, in another moment he may move to a less favourable position. Again the sight travels from the knee to behind the shoulder; again I feel that I am too hurried, but this time mortal finger will bear the suspense no longer, and the trigger is drawn. Crack! it is over. Can that be the *thud* I have heard deer-stalkers describe—the hollow dead sound of the well-directed ball? I fear not, for see, they are dancing away towards the hill, apparently not going very fast, pitching and lurching along much at their ease, and not at all as if they were frightened. My fellow is in the rear; can he be wounded and lagging behind? no, he joins the others, and now they all turn to the right, and re-crossing a small burn appear to be coming back to us. M'Cormick, who has been looking through his glass

with a satisfied air that ought to have convinced me I had made a clean miss, the next best thing at all times to a "clean shot," shuts up his glass in a twinkling, loads my rifle in double quick time, and without a word of explanation, but almost imperceptibly signing to me to follow, dashes away over the moor, making furious running in a diagonal direction up the hill, bounding over the mosses like a tennis ball, whilst I labour breathlessly in his rear, eyes watering, head swimming, and knees shaking, but inwardly trusting that all these exertions may in some way lead to the retrieval of my character as a sportsman. How I got up that hill, or how I contrived to wait upon the sinewy little highlander in that severe race, I have never been able to conceive. Fortunately my rifle was a heavy double-barrelled one, and as *he* carried the fire-arms, it may be that the weight brought us somewhat together. However, this forced handicap at length came to an end; and when I threw myself prostrate by my leader, where he had quietly sat himself down and was pressing the caps more firmly on my rifle, I found that, strategist as he was, he had conducted me to a pass up which his sagacity and experience informed him our deer

were almost certain to make; and not only these, but also a large herd that had been disturbed by the flight of their friends, and who incontinently made for this well-known passage. Long before they appeared I heard them coming; quicker and louder was the tramp; I even heard them blowing like so many overdriven sheep, and at last up the steep they charged "*en masse.*" The run in for the Great Yorkshire Handicap would have hardly made more noise. I picked out a big one in obedience to Sandy's "Noo, noo;" but whether the pace deceived me, or the excitement was too much for me, I know not; I have only reason to believe that the billet appropriated to my bullet was drawn upon mother earth. The second barrel, however, was more fortunate; as, although a regard for truth forces me to confess, I fired into "the brown of them," it lodged just behind the shoulder of a very fair-sized, decent sort of stag—by no means one of the finest, but an average sort of fellow, that weighed some twelve stone after he was "*gralloched.*" Poor fellow! I thought of Jaques and his "dappled fool"—a disrespectful epithet for so noble an animal—as he tried in vain to stagger on with the rest of the herd.

Soon he stopped, sickening; and ere the rifle was again loaded, he was prostrate in the heather, kicking convulsively on his back.

It was a moment of triumph, when M'Cormick, running up to the dead deer, putting his knife in his throat—a piece of carving which I declined the honour of performing—proceeded to gralloch him *secundum artem*, and pronounced him a "fine fat beastie," whilst I smoked a cigar by his side, and persuaded myself I had killed him most artistically. His head was his worst part, numbering but few points; however, he would doubtless have had a very fine one in a year or two, had he been spared, as M'Cormick remarked for my consolation. Triumphant as I was, I could not help feeling something akin to remorse at what I had done—this morning bounding over the moor in vigour and beauty, and now stretched upon the heather "a slovenly unhandsome corse." So it ever is; an alloy must be mixed with all earthly pleasures, and in shooting more especially: it is difficult to say what *is* the moment of enjoyment, though the fascination of the pursuit on the whole is undeniable.

"Well, M'Cormick, another sup from the

flask, and then we shall be better able to decide upon our future proceedings."

A long and unsuccessful stalk, spoilt by putting up an envious old cock-grouse just as we were getting within shot, brought us nearly to the twilight hour, and darkness had closed upon the mountains ere we reached the forester's lodge, where we met Beeswing and his companions glorying in the downfal of two fine stags; the one a royal one, the other the antelope-headed hart that had been coveted so long. An enthusiast in stalking, as in all other sports, I had better give a detail of his adventures in his own words, which served to beguile our long and wearisome journey home, performed in the primitive fashion usually called "ride and tie."

"After I left you," said Beeswing, "the parcel of deer that we had made up our mind to circumvent shifted their position, and, moving up the hill to some very rugged ground, gave us a capital opportunity of coming in above them, and so getting more easily within shot. After a council of war and a good look at the ground, we determined to move cautiously down the burn that you remember remarking, then along the wood at

the bottom of the glen, and so, by a wide circuit over the tops, keep our advantage of the wind, and make a pretty sure, though a long and tedious stalk. Accordingly down the course of the burn we went, creeping on our hands and knees, and occasionally stopping and taking a look through the glasses to see that the deer had not moved. All was most favourable, the wind was quite steady from the same quarter as before, and the deer appeared to have no idea of changing their ground. At last we reached the river at the bottom of the glen, and, after fording it, proceeded to walk in a more comfortable attitude through those magnificent old firs that fringe the water all the way down its course. You, who are fond of scenery, would have been delighted with it. All round us the giant fir-trees were standing in every kind of position, rugged and magnificent as the mountain that over-topped them. Beneath our feet the river was brawling and rippling its course towards the western loch; and whenever we got a glimpse of the far distance through a vista in the dark pine wood, our view was shut in by the 'monarch of mountains,' rearing its conical-shaped head towards the heavens, and blue as the summer

sky into which he seemed to melt. I confess I walked along so absorbed in the wild charms of the scene, that deer-stalking was the last thing I thought about, and I got into the realms of fancy as far as the Rocky Mountains and the peaks of the Himalayas (in both of which ranges, as in many other places, I have wasted my time), till I was recalled to the business in hand by a whisper from the cautious Sandy to the grey man, which, when rendered into the Saxon, signified that it was quite possible to come upon deer in the wood, and that the gentleman (meaning me) had been 'here before.' This significant hint was not lost upon grey Donald, and our order of march was resumed with the caution so necessary where deer are concerned, and which we had all laid aside for a time, to enjoy the luxury of straightening our backs and stretching our limbs after our transit down the burn. As the wood got thicker we moved more stealthily, and I remarked in one or two mossy places the tracks of deer, evidently quite fresh, and from one of the prints on a sandy spot at the water's edge, it was evident that a large heavy deer had been there this morning. I was sure we all drew the same conclusion,

though not a word or sign did we exchange; but I thought the grey man's caution was redoubled, and Sandy kept turning a piece of heather round his brown fingers, as he always does under strong excitement. Suddenly Donald stopped, and ere he could turn to me, the same object brought me down upon my marrow-bones in a twinkling. There in front of us, not sixty yards off and fast asleep, lay a magnificent dark-coloured stag, with a royal head to all appearance, and not a sentry near him in the shape of hind or companion. We could see his great brown side and one of his horns; but from where we lay, it was impossible to cover a vital place. Without exchanging a syllable, Donald and I simultaneously pointed to a soft boggy place about twenty yards below us, where we should be more under cover, and probably be able to get a better view of him, while at the same time we should increase the distance but little. You may suppose that extreme caution was required to shift our ambush, and once during the operation he lifted his head; like Medusa's, it turned us for the moment to stone, and ere I had time to count his points, for I could see him quite plain through some scrubby juniper, he sank to

sleep again. Well, we got to our lair at last; and when we arrived there, we found that he had shifted his attitude again, so that his back was to us, and as long as his head was down it would be impossible to *account for him*. There was nothing for it but patience; we were in the best possible position should he get up, and we dared not risk another move for fear of disturbing him, more particularly as we could not be certain that there were no other deer in his vicinity. I contrived to look at my watch, and you may imagine how long the time must have appeared when I tell you that we waited there quite an hour—what a nap he must have had! I had determined in my own mind not to give him longer than that, and there I lay, rifle cocked and finger on the trigger, biding my time. Very few events happened to beguile the weary minutes: once a couple of wild ducks soared over our heads high up in the sky, and once I fancied I caught the sound of the trampling of deer, but faint and indistinct, and producing no effect on my sleepy friend. A passing cloud gave us the benefit of its contents, but we bore its wrath even more philosophically than Socrates did his ducking from Xantippe, and soon the sun

shone bright as ever again. At last, time was up, and I determined, come what might, to rouse my royal victim. Cautiously and slowly I covered the spot where his head *should be*, and, when I had secured my range, gave a long shrill whistle, such as I have heard accompany the vociferous demand for music shouted by the Olympic gods of modern times: as I anticipated, up went his head to listen, the back of it between the horns completing the straight line of which I had got the first two points with the sight and notch of my rifle. That instant I pressed the trigger, and with a bound into the air the glorious fellow turned over and lay motionless upon his last resting-place. We gralloched him on the spot, and left him there to be brought home this evening. His head was a particularly fine one—royal, having twelve points, and the three topmost forming a cup on each side quite '*en règle*.' His antlers were magnificent, spreading almost into a semi-circle, and, in short, one of the finest heads I ever saw. We poured an appropriate libation, in the shape of a dram, down each of our throats; and whilst the disembowelling process went on, I found the grey man became much more communicative. It

appears that he knew me by name, having been employed in a large and well-known forest where I used to stalk a good deal, though I had never actually been out with him; and amongst other matters connected with deer, he told me one curious fact, which proves how strong the vital principle must be in the wild animal.

"His former noble master—whose coronet should have borne the heather-blossom proper, interlaced with its own strawberry leaves, so fond was he of 'the hill,' and so untiring and successful a deer-stalker—had shot a fine stag through the heart, one day at the commencement of the season. On opening him the duke's bullet was found, as might have been expected, having passed right through the heart and caused instantaneous death; but, *mirabile dictu*, another ball was likewise discovered actually embedded in the fleshy part of that vital region, which from its appearance must have been there a considerable time. Whether the deer had actually been shot in the spot where the bullet was found, or whether it had worked its way gradually from a wound in some other part of the body, it is impossible to say; but I believe this is the only instance

of an animal surviving the contact of a foreign substance, such as lead, with its heart.

"Well, this being entirely an extra performance, and a piece of unlooked-for good fortune, I gave my auxiliaries an additional sup, and we then proceeded to stalk the original herd that we had seen from 'the cairn.' We had, of course, to take a fresh observation, and found that they had again moved, and were apparently somewhat restless; the consequence was that we had a most severe stalk. Once, when we were getting near them, they moved across a corrie in a manner that obliged us to enter upon a new system of operation. Another time the wind changed, and we had to begin over again, thinking ourselves lucky that they did not discover us; at last we got well above them, and into some pretty good ground, that bid fair to bring us within distance unobserved. Everything was propitious, and we had advanced to, as near as I could guess, about one hundred and fifty yards from them, when we distinctly heard them move. It was impossible to say what had disturbed them, but disturbed they certainly were, and the only thing to be done was to rush forward to the brow that we were making for, and take the chance

of a wild shot. A hundred yards did it, and never in my life did I go such a pace—up hill too. When I got to the brow they were lurching away over a moss, some three hundred yards below; but, '*fortunati nimium*,' one fat heavy fellow had loitered behind the herd, and had stopped to rub his horns against a scraggy dead tree that stood out in the foreground—there never was such a piece of luck: it was the antelope head. Down I squatted upon the heather, got a rest upon my knee, took lots of elevation, for I had hardly time to put up my second sight; and blown as I was, I shot him right through the heart—'more by good luck than good management'—but I was delighted to get him, and I think altogether this has been one of the most satisfactory days at deer that I have ever enjoyed."

THE END.

Printed by Rogerson and Tuxford, 246, Strand, London.

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